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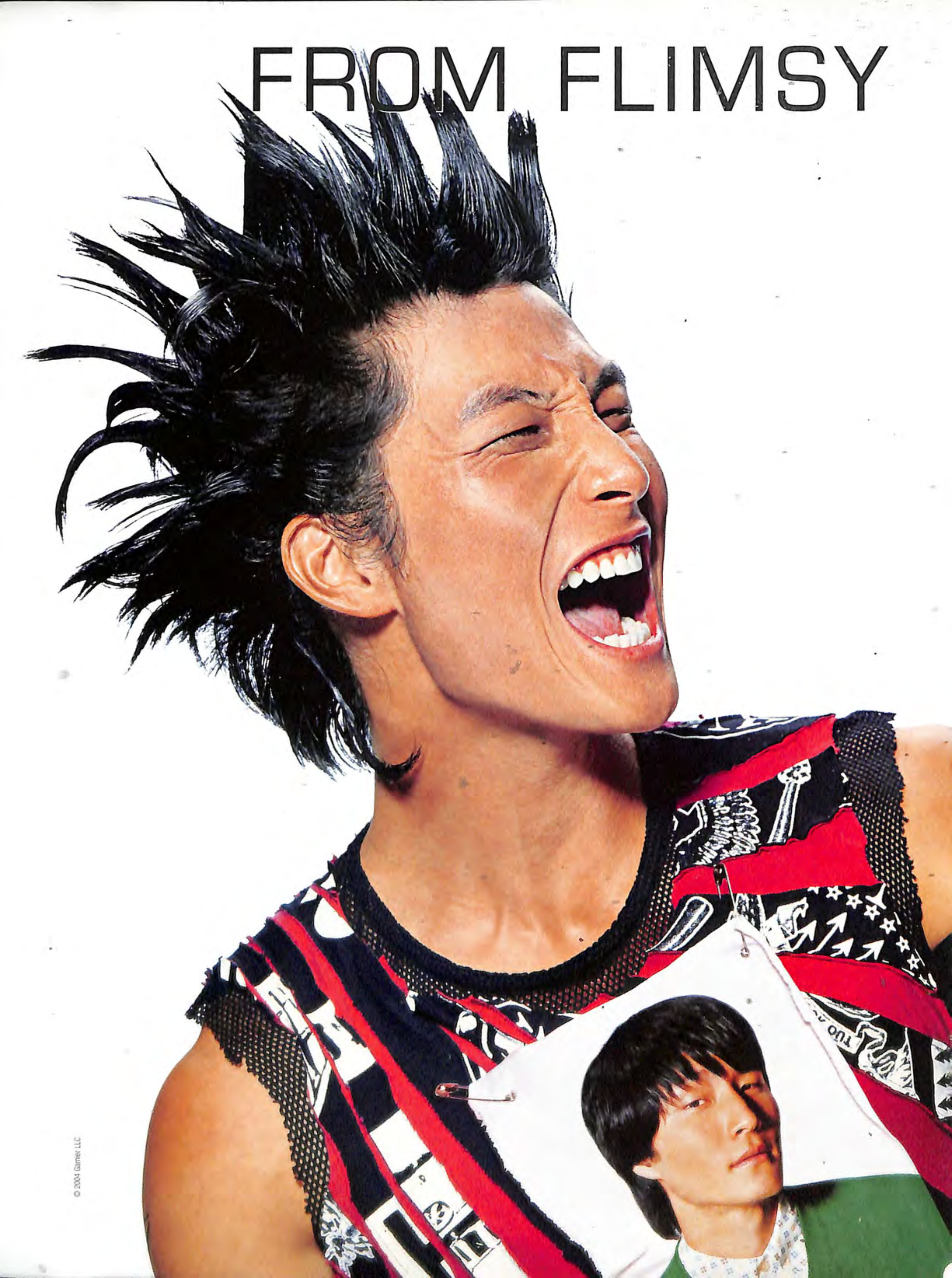

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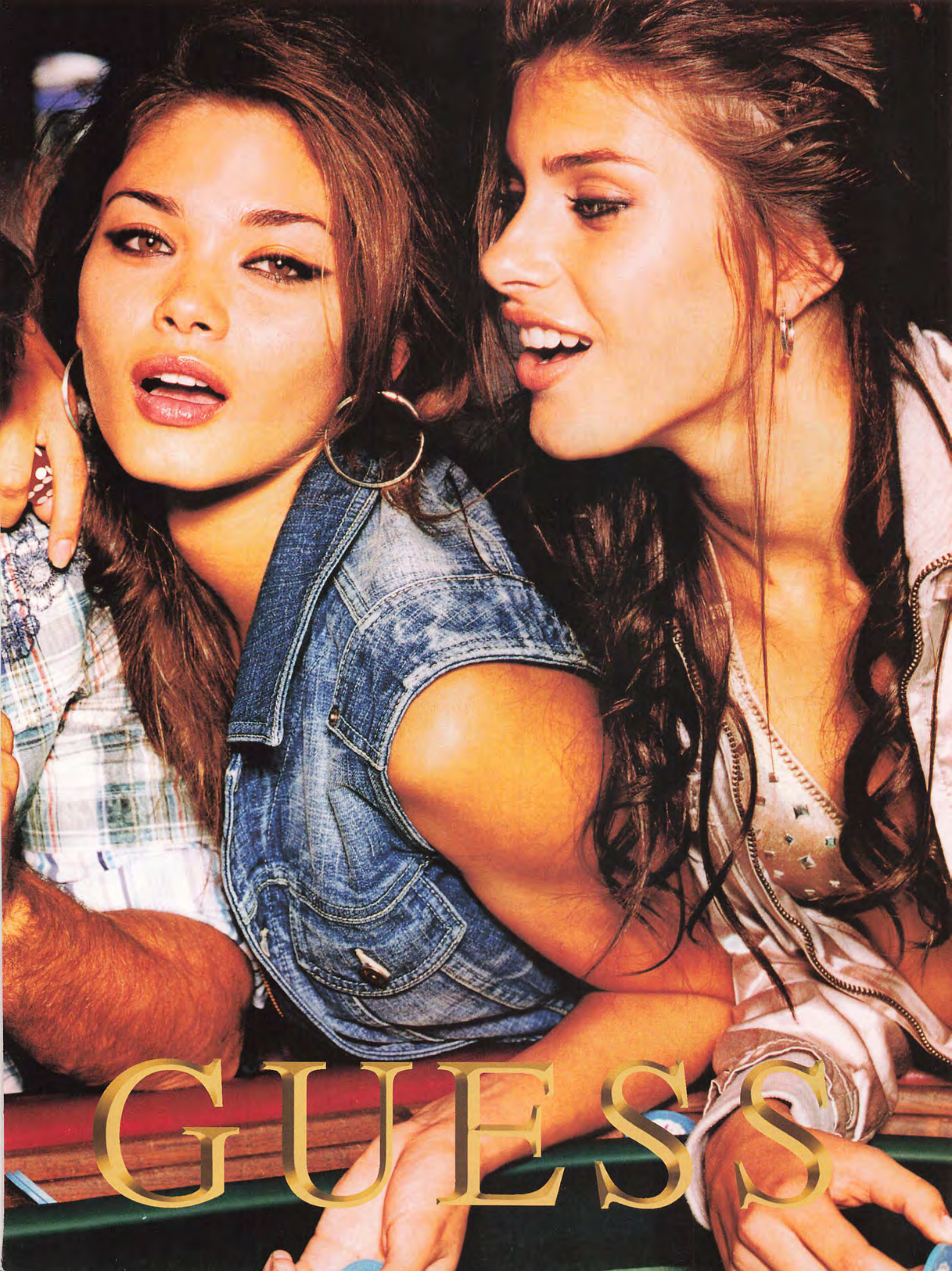
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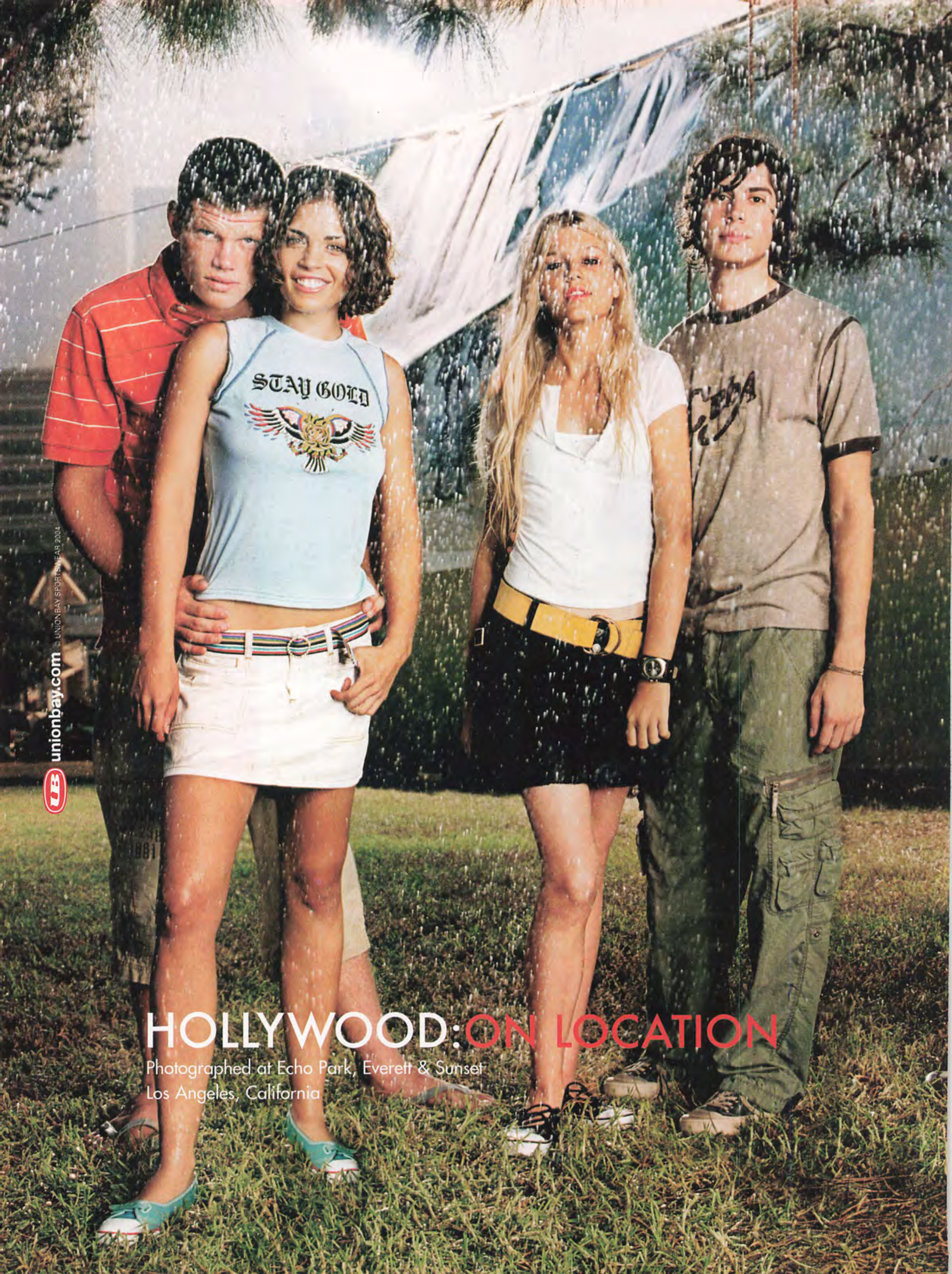
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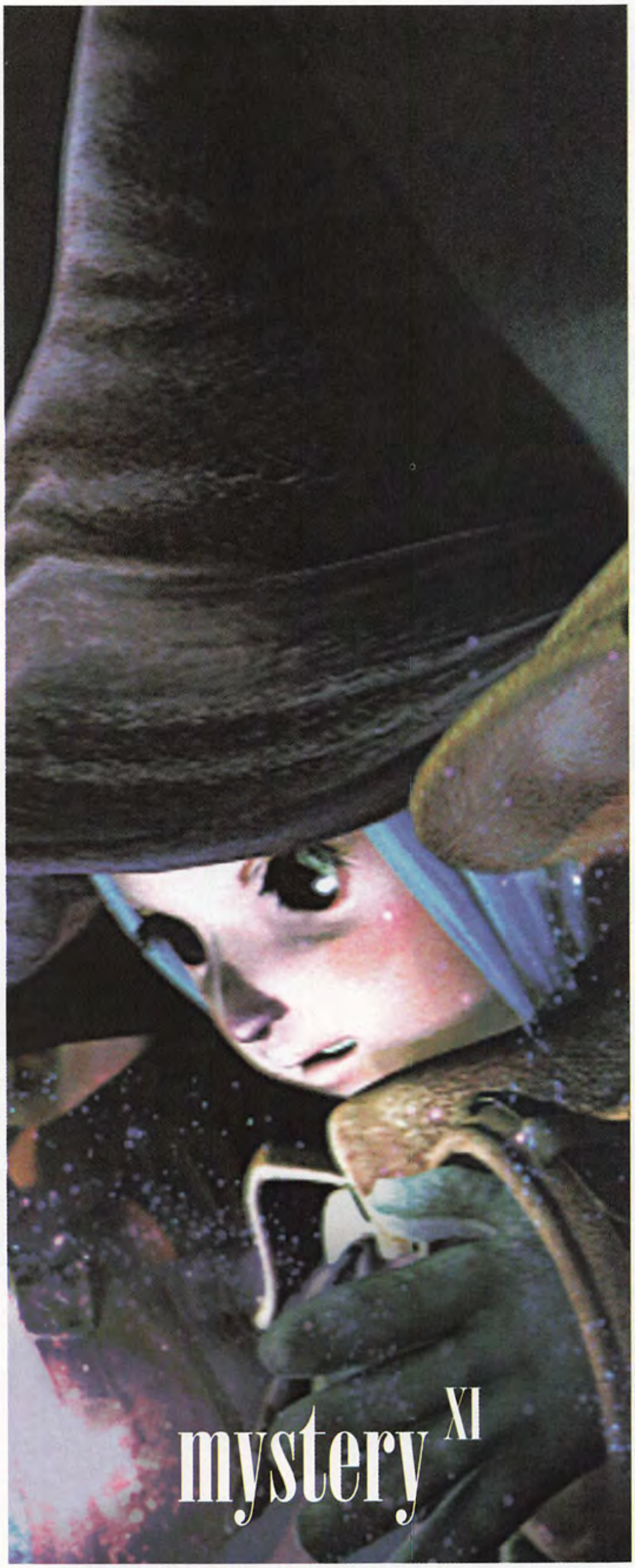

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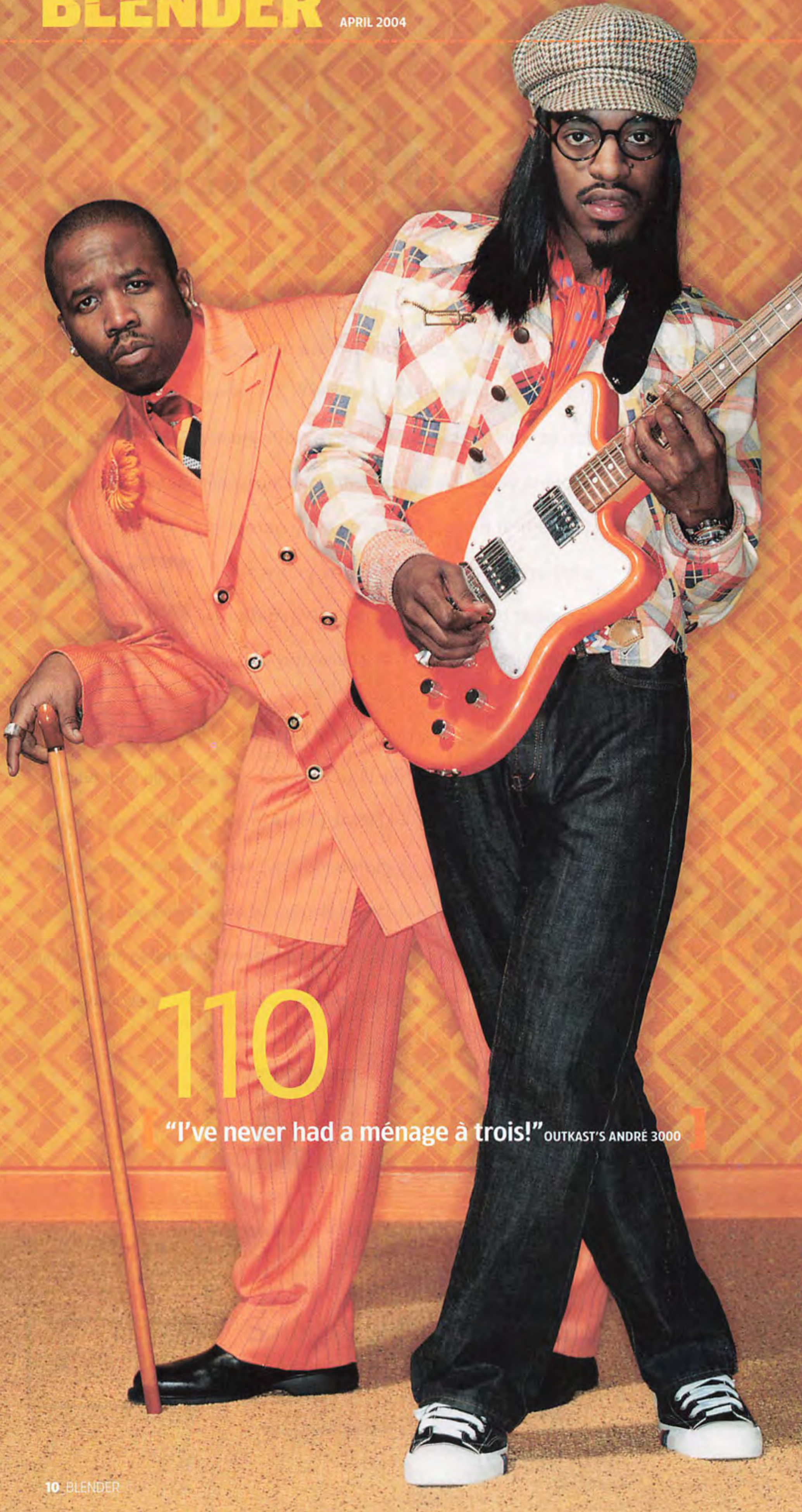

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"I've never had a ménage à trois!" OUTKAST'S ANDRÉ 3000

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Last October, guitarist Ben Moody left Evanescence just as the band was becoming huge. In her first interview since his departure, singer Amy Lee reveals what happened.

69 DIGITAL-MUSIC GEAR GUIDE 2004
Do you wake up in the middle of the night in a sweat because you don't know the difference between a Dell DJ 20 and an iRiver iHP-140? Well, don't panic, because we do. Now go back to sleep, you crazy bastard!

82 THE HIP-HOP GANGS OF CHINATOWN
Why the future of hip-hop can be found on the mean streets of New York's Chinatown — along with the bullet casings.

90 KYLIE MINOGUE
Life's big questions answered by the pert pop princess. No, really! Plus: How well do you know celebrity butts?

96 THE 50 CRAZIEST POP STARS EVER!
Sex! Drugs! Bats! And that's just Ozzy Osbourne. (And he's only at number 10!)

110 OUTKAST
The future looks bright for America's new favorite group. Or does it? "In a perfect world," André 3000 confides to *Blender*, "this would be the last Outkast record."

ON THE COVER >>>>>

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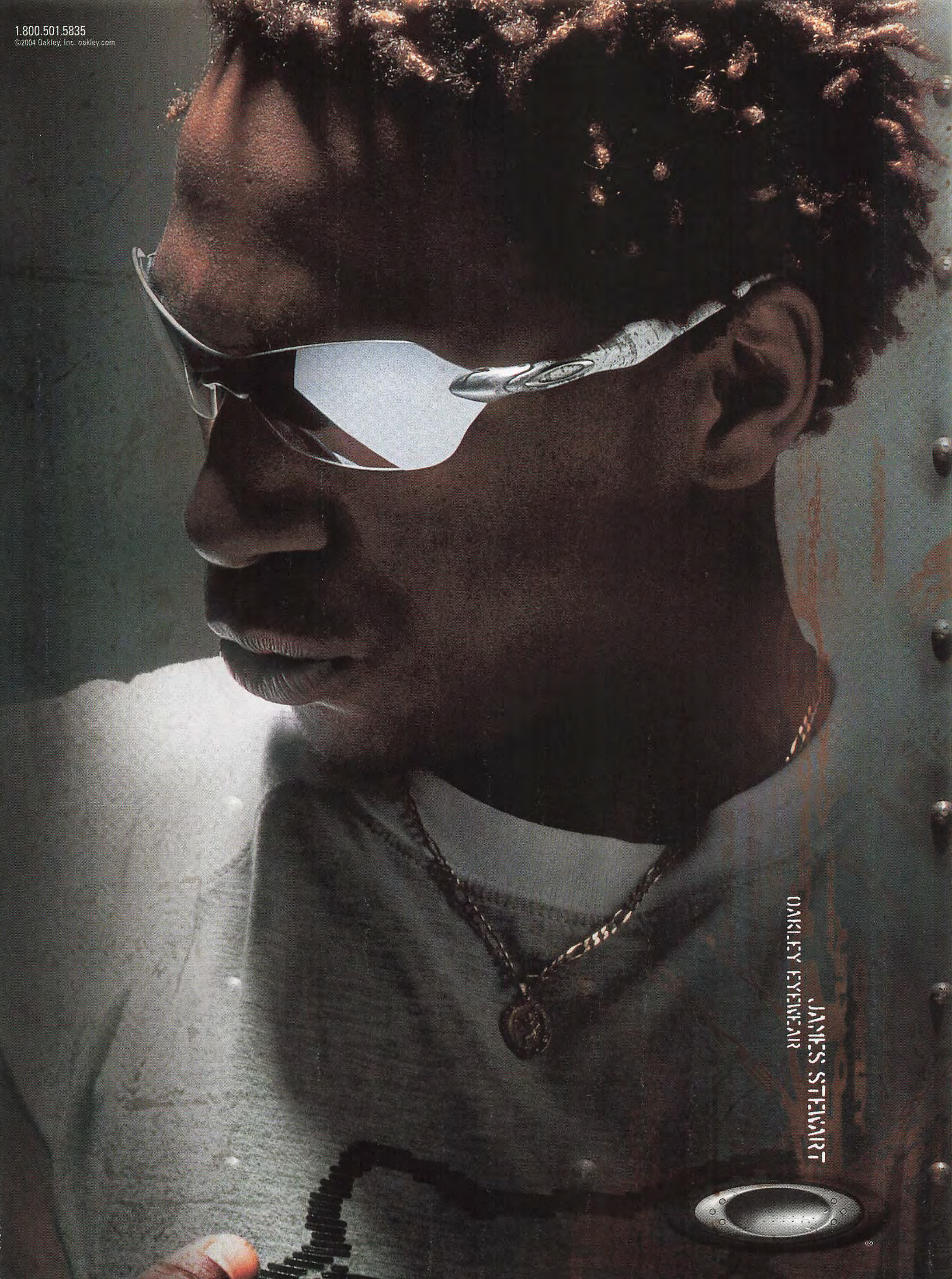
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Jem; the Von Bondies

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Hip-hop overlord Pharrell Williams of N*E*R*D* answers your questions about dating a supermodel, losing a beer gut and why you probably can't afford to employ him.

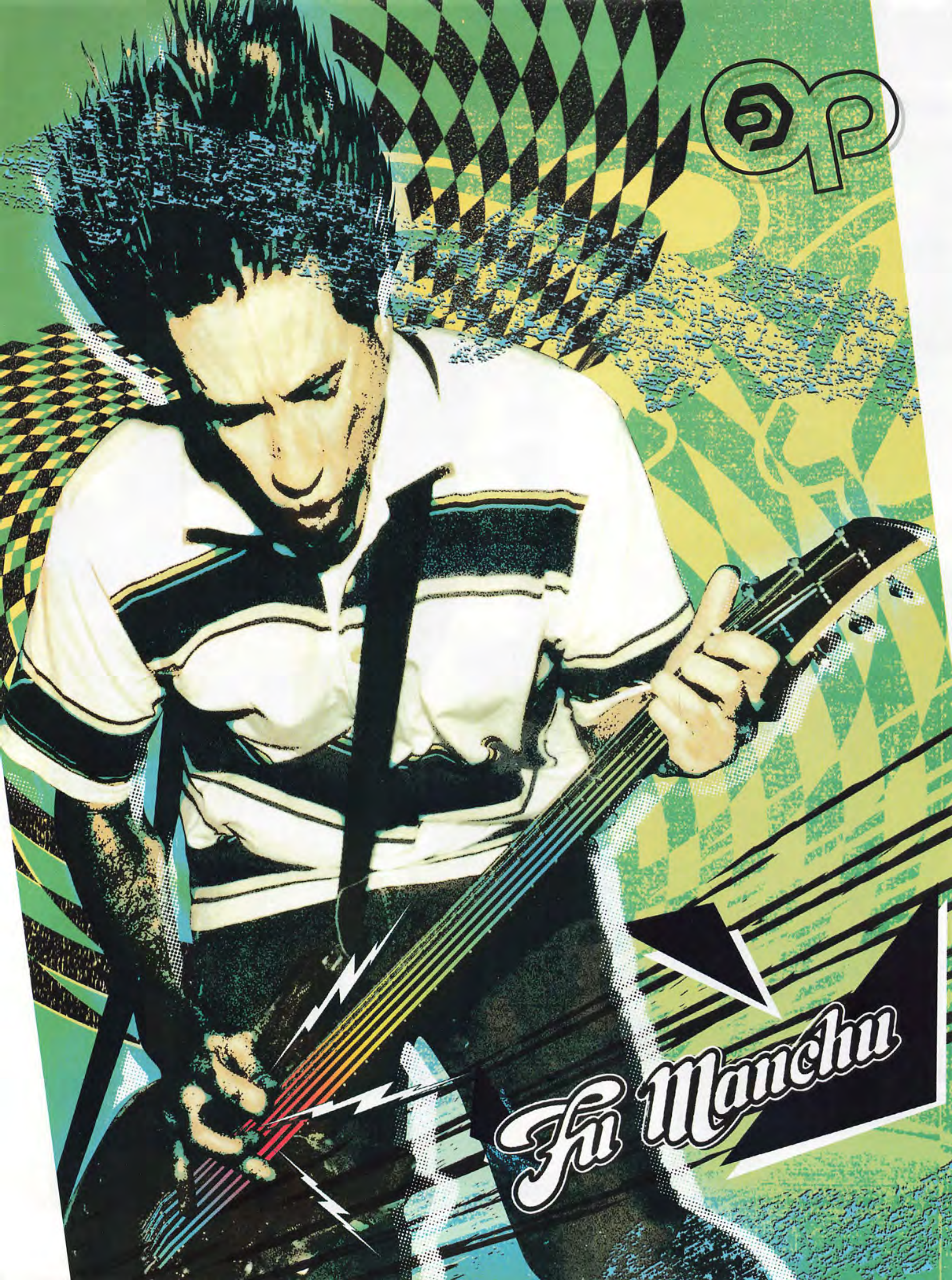
58 THE GREATEST SONGS EVER!
Thanks to a rampaging coke habit, the Thin White Duke was *really* thin when he entered the studio in August 1974 — but that didn't stop David Bowie from recording the "plastic soul" classic "Young Americans."

62 ASK BLENDER
The terrible truth about Jim Morrison's Oedipal complex; the Black Eyed Peas' embarrassing kids-show past; and . . . *the loudest concert ever!*

160 WHO DOES JC CHASEZ THINK HE IS?
Guess what? The former 'N Syncer wants you to call him "Shitty."

[90 **"Big knickers are back!"** KYLIE MINOGUE]

Todd Barry (Minogue); Adrian Boot/RetnaUK (the Clash); Alphonse Telymonde (Bowie still-life); Michael Lavine (the Von Bondies)


Fu Manchu

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["Never take a job you can't get loaded on." JOHNNY KNOXVILLE]

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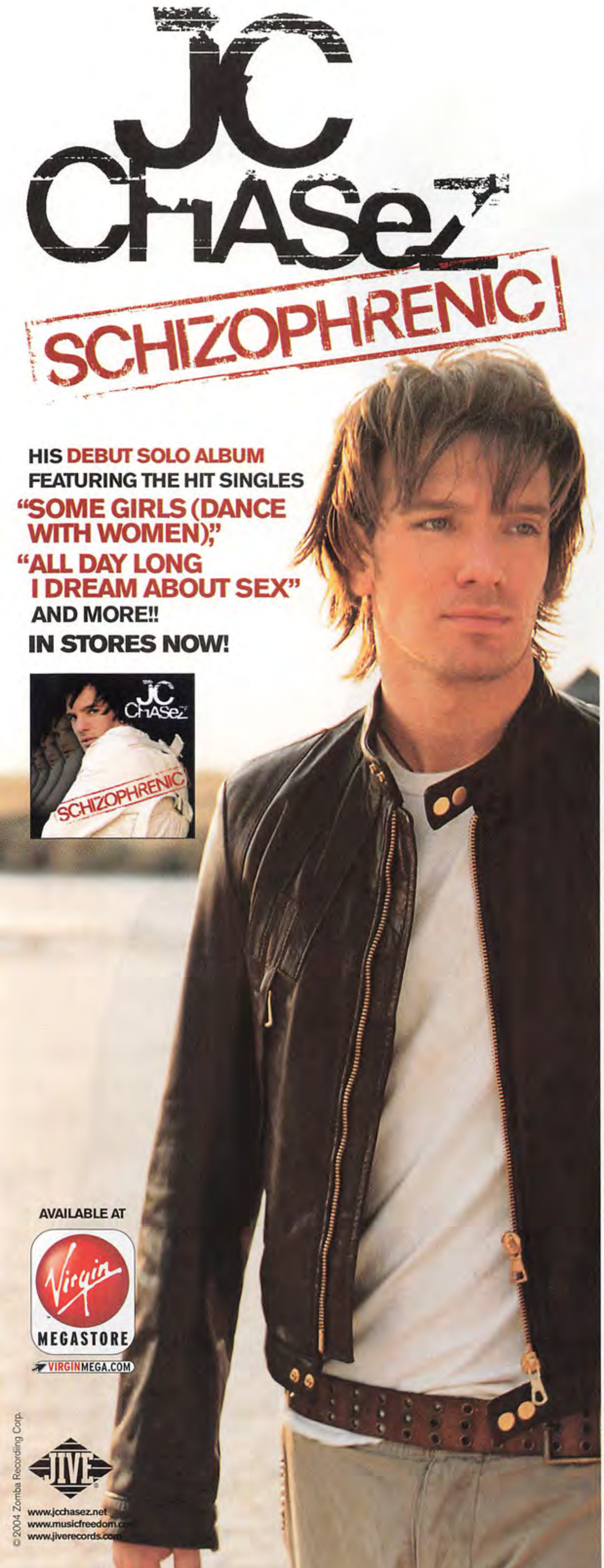

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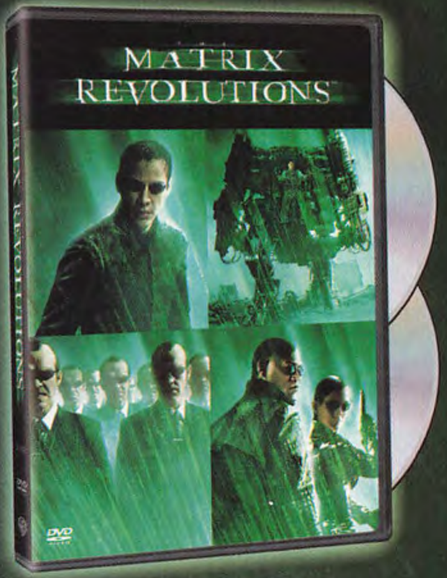
> — Roger Ebert, CHICAGO SUN-TIMES



FULLY LOADED 2-DISC DVD

REVOLUTIONS RECALIBRATED – The making of this final chapter

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SUPER BURLY BRAWL – Behind the final Neo/Smith showdown

FUTURE GAMER: THE MATRIX ONLINE – A look at the multiplayer game

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3-D EVOLUTION – Multidimensional stills gallery

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The Most Advanced Music Mag In the World

OBSERVANT READERS will have recently noticed a sea change in the whole business of listening to music. It seems there are other ways to hear your favorite tunes than by messing about with those fiddly pieces of round plastic. Shocking news, I know.

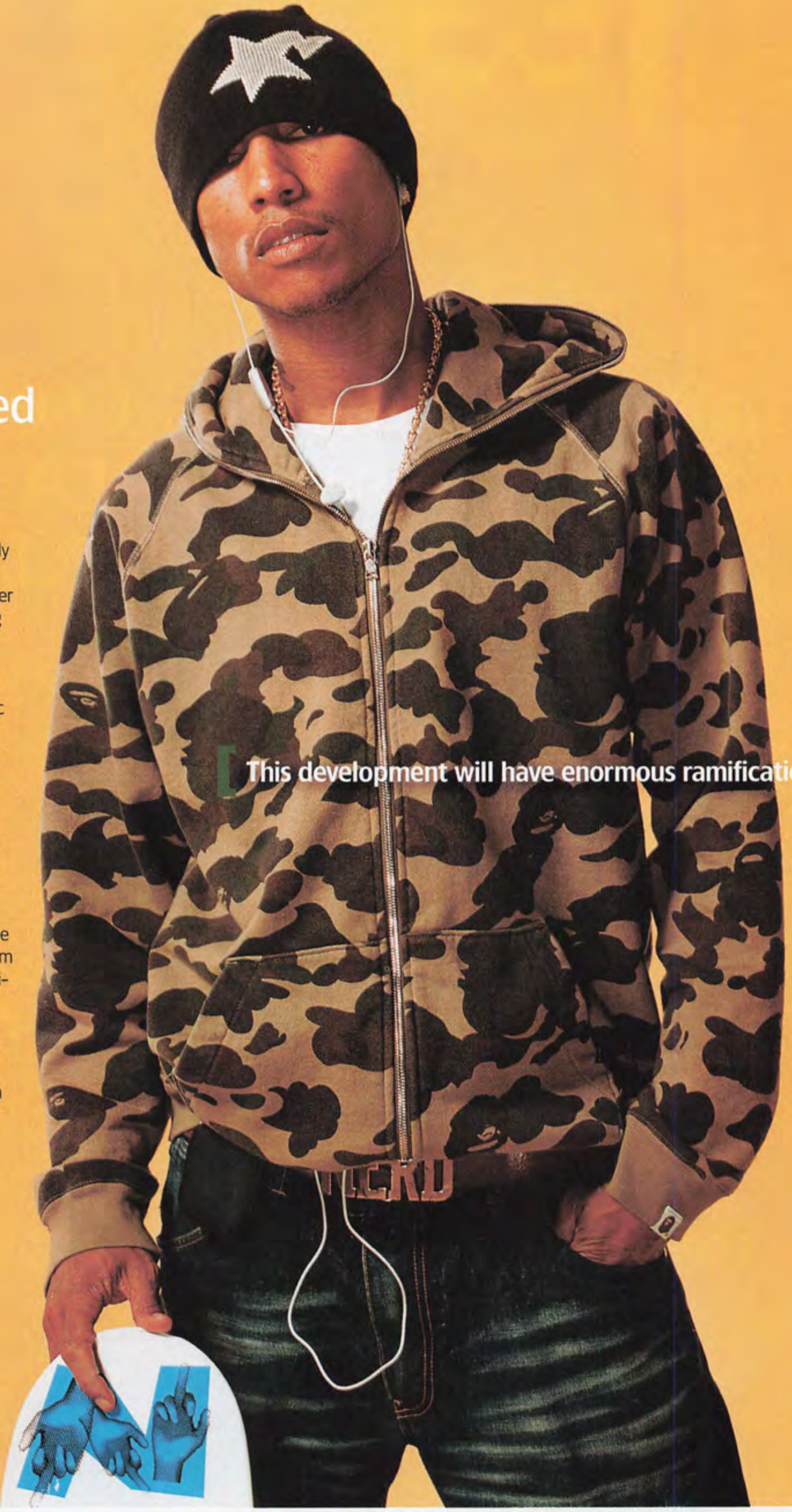
It turns out that via what boffins are calling the "Inter-net," music fans can "down load" music and play it on a "magical clicky box." At least I think that's what Igor, *Blender's* resident techie, told me. I have also been informed that this relatively new development will have "massive ramifications."

With that in mind, *Blender* has rejiggered its enormous reviews section. We now recommend up to three great tracks to download from each album — you'll find them listed at the end of every review. To kick the whole thing off, this issue we feature the most cutting-edge equipment from the digital-music world — plus all the usual musical malarkey, too!

Igor tells me this makes *Blender* the most technologically advanced music magazine in the world. Which is great news! Meanwhile, anyone who wants the complete Kansas back catalog on 8-track should contact yours truly at the usual address.

Enjoy the issue!

ANDY PEMBERTON
EDITOR IN CHIEF



[This development will have enormous ramifications.]

Marc Baptiste (Williams); TNT Productions (Pemberton)

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You've Got Mail!

WE WANT YOU TO SHARE . . .

Jessica Simpson: Someone needs to towel-dry.

A VERY SPECIAL TV ISSUE!
BLENDER
JESSICA SIMPSON
25
KID ROCK

SPINE-TINGLING

The lyric on the spine of the March issue of *Blender* — "In my heart I'll always see you/Everywhere" — is from Tim McGraw's "Everywhere." His father, former baseball player Tug McGraw, died in January. It's good to see *Blender* pay its respects.

DENISE PHRASEN, MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

WINNER!

"You talk about every band/But the names you drop are secondhand": That was the upside-down lyric on the last page of your March issue, and it's from the absolutely awesome glam classic "Fox on the Run," by the Sweet. I should win a prize, don't you think?

NICO KASLUSKY, ANAHEIM, CALIFORNIA

Yes, we do.

ENTERTAINING YET WEIRD!

Very entertaining Jessica Simpson cover feature ["Queen of the Boob Tube," March]. But does anyone else find it weird for her father to be saying of his own daughter, "She's sexy in a T-shirt *or* a bikini"?

JANICE GEYSEN, PUNTA GORDA, FLORIDA

No. Our fathers used to say that about us. And that's just the guys!

I AM INTO PLUSHIES AND VINYL

I'm an avid reader of *Blender*. I find it the only consistently trustworthy music-reviews magazine on this side of the Atlantic Ocean. Recently, I was horrified to discover that my beloved daughter had spilled her Hershey's chocolate drink all over my new issue before I even had a chance to give it the customary once-over. I don't want an MP3 player prize of any kind (I'm into plushies and vinyl), but I'd certainly love another issue. . . .

W. REILLY, DOWNINGTON, PENNSYLVANIA

Consider it sent, you weirdo. (The plushies we're definitely down with, for sure, but vinyl?)

★ Congratulations to the winner of *Blender*'s January/February Crossword contest, who walks away with a fancy new kickin' stereo system: Chris Brunn of Houston. *Yes!*

LISTEN UP! >>

CALLING ALL *BLENDER* readers: We want to hear from you! Write us a letter. Tell us your deepest thoughts and secret desires. . . . Er, well, maybe just your thoughts, then. If we print your letter in our next issue, we'll send you the amazing SlimX 400, iRiver's premier MP3-CD player. It features playlist management, built-in FM tuner, skip-free music playback, up to 23 hours of play time and MP3, WMA and ASF format support. *Wow!*

Send your letters to Letters to the Editor, **Blender**, *1040 Avenue of the Americas, 22nd floor, New York, New York 10018. Or: your2cents@blender.com. Hell, yes!*

COMPLETE ASSES!

What a great Dear Superstar column featuring Tenacious D [January]! Those guys are what rock & roll should be: fun, loud and not afraid to make complete asses of themselves just for the sake of rock! A lot of pompous bands out there could learn a lesson from Tenacious D that music is supposed to be about sex, drugs and rock & roll!

ISAAC V., TOLEDO, OHIO

Keith Richards: Not dead!

DEATH EXPLAINS EVERYTHING

In your macabre feature charting various stars' projected death dates ["When Will Your Favorite Pop Star Die?", March], Keith Richards apparently died back in 1995. Does that explain the poor quality of the Rolling Stones album *Bridges to Babylon,* which was recorded two years later?

RICH BARTLETT, NEW YORK, NEW YORK

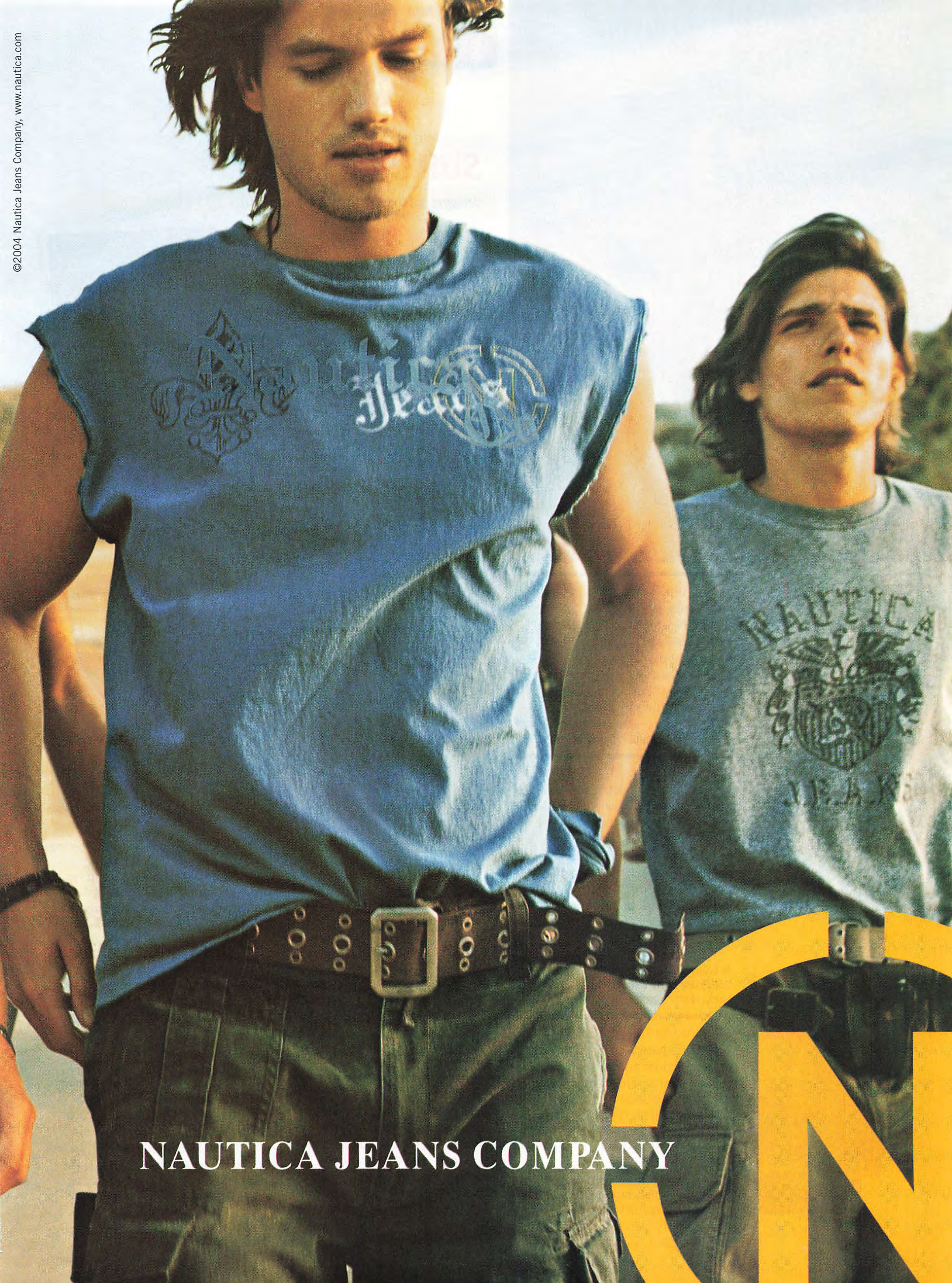
Yes.

UNLADYLIKE!

What's going on in that photo of Courtney Love and her daughter, Frances Bean Cobain, on page 21 of your January issue? You guys politely referred to it as Love "hosting a photo opportunity" with her kid, but it looks like the poor girl is trying to escape. Who would blame her? Love is one of the most unladylike people on the planet! (Swearing at people's grandmothers while speeding away in a Ford isn't proper etiquette, after all.) I'd be ashamed if she was my mother. And please, don't even get me started on her supposed "music."

NANCE YUAN, SAN FRANCISCO →

James White (Simpson); Kevin Mazur/Contour Photos (Richards)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Kid Rock: Smoking is cool/life-threatening.

FUNNY DRUNK GUY

I really enjoyed your feature detailing exactly "How to Be Kid Rock" [March]. He seems like a nice, down-to-earth, funny guy. But I had to wonder — shouldn't the article really have been called "How to Be a Womanizing, Hat-Wearing Drunk" instead?

JARED MINAR, WESTBURY, NEW YORK

Yes. But that wouldn't fit on the page.

BLENDER IS READING YOUR MIND

Yesterday I was wondering when one of my favorite bands, Unwritten Law, was going to come out with a new album. Not 24 hours later, I opened up my new *Blender* and read that they're in the studio working on the follow-up to their 2002 album, *Elva.* Not only do you guys offer the best reviews and the most entertaining articles, but you also read minds!

BLAKE BALDWIN, PORTLAND, OREGON

Actually, Blake, we have your entire house under surveillance around the clock. Nice curtains!

Michael Jackson dances on his car/ impersonates Lenin.

JACKO IS INNOCENT! WELL, MAYBE

I appreciate how much fun it is to tear down celebrities, and usually I couldn't be happier when it happens. But given that Michael Jackson is such a target for blackmail, is his not a case where we should wait until he's proven guilty before putting the boot in?

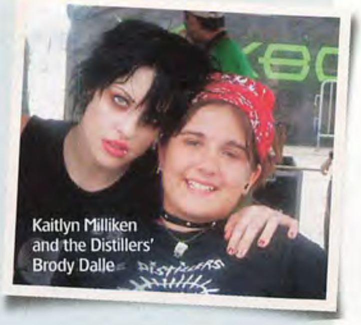
SEAN RECTOR, ELGIN, ILLINOIS

Apparently not. Here's a joke for you: How many Michael Jacksons does it take to molest a bunch of kids? One.

SUPERFAN!

Bringing out the stalker in you since 2001

Colleen Keating and Bono


Kaitlyn Milliken and the Distillers' Brody Dalle

Nicole Theiss and Simon Le Bon

Marcie Prather and David Hasselhoff

Leslie Mise and Shania Twain

Justin Peterson and the Flaming Lips' Wayne Coyne

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I LIKE MEN

Maybe Willa Ford ["Who Does Willa Ford Think She Is?", January] drew herself as a penis because you can't help but look like a dick when you refer to yourself in the third person. Speaking of dicks: How about a guy on the cover? I'm sick of those drag-queen wannabes Xtina and Britney. And now Jessica Simpson! What's wrong with you? Sorry, Thom Yorke doesn't count. I want someone attractive. *Please.*

SAMANTHA KAHN, EL CENTRO, CALIFORNIA

It was your letter that inspired us to put Outkast on the cover of this issue instead of those pics we took of Britney, Xtina and Shakira in a naked threesome. ➔

F. Scott Schafer (Kid Rock); Splash News (Jackson)

IF THIS BOTTLE FELL ON NEWTON'S HEAD TODAY HE'D PROBABLY SCRAP THE WHOLE GRAVITY THING AND JUST SUE.

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Jet: Don't sit on the wet spot!

LETTERS >>

BLOCKED TOILET!

I want to say how great Aussie rockers Jet came across in your interview ["Old School!", March]. If they're ever near Muncie, Indiana, they're welcome to take a rest from the tour bus and stay in my apartment. And I won't even complain if they block my toilet!

MORRIS REYNOLDS, MUNCIE, INDIANA

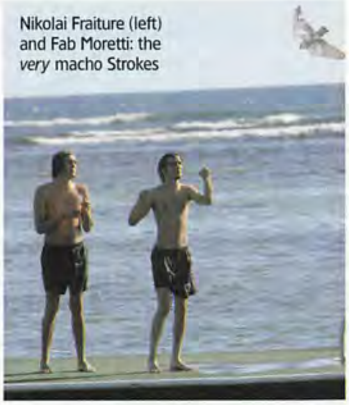
Oh, sure, you say that *now*. . . .

THE STROKES ARE EVERYWHERE

I was minding my own business lounging on the beach in Hawaii, when all of a sudden I saw a bunch of floppy-haired, pasty-skinned, lanky-bodied indie-rockers. After a minute, I realized they were no imitation indie-rockers — they were the Strokes! The Strokes really *are* everywhere. What a shock their fellow vacationers must have gotten when they saw the Strokes romping in the waves in Hawaii. They must have been the palest people there!

ADAM LEMAIRE, PEORIA, ARIZONA

Well, until Michael Jackson showed up.



Nikolai Fraiture (left) and Fab Moretti: the *very* macho Strokes

DRUMMERS RULE

In recent Life After Rock features, I've noticed, you've been featuring a string of has-been drummers. I'm a drummer myself, and the future now scares me.

HUGH YANUARIA, LOS ANGELES

Then our work here is done.

BLENDER IS SCUM

I was appalled at *Blender*'s interview with Britney Spears ["Britney Busts Loose!", January]. Your writer, William Shaw, said to her, "In the wake of the September 11 attacks, you were mentioned as one of the reasons people were hostile to America. You were alleged to represent the immorality and hegemony of American culture." How could you tell a 22-year-old woman that she was one of the reasons thousands of people lost their lives on September 11, 2001? I happen to be a Spears fan, but even if you had asked that question of Tom Cruise, Andy Roddick, the Dixie Chicks or Mariah Carey, I'd still call you scum.

VINCENT TARDUCCI, PHILADELPHIA

YOU OWE AN APOLOGY

Your comment about Britney Spears and September 11 was complete bull. She had nothing to do with the attacks, except for helping children who were hurt in them. I demand an apology.

MARK EDWARD, VIA E-MAIL

Sorry, Vincent and Mark, but we were under the impression that it was precisely the freedom to pose the kind of questions we did that makes this country so goddamned great. Next time, we'll be sure to ask only the most anodyne questions we can think of.

THE PATH LESS TRAVELED

I want to commend William Shaw for his great interview with Britney Spears. Usually, when a writer does an interview with someone who is difficult and unresponsive, he writes either a puff piece or an article about how difficult she was. However, Shaw decided not to take either of these roads. His was one of the first articles about Spears that I've ever read. Her music isn't what I listen to. When I've come across articles about her in the past, I've usually just skimmed the first couple of paragraphs and then moved on. That's what I started to do with Shaw's piece, but I kept reading and completed the whole article. Keep up the good work.

ANDREW SAIDI, LOS ANGELES

BRITNEY, PLEASE DON'T MARRY ME

In Shaw's article, Britney Spears says Christina Aguilera tried to French-kiss her at a nightclub. Little did Christina know that if she had just waited for Britney to have a few more drinks, she could have talked her into marriage.

JASON SATTERFIELD, GLENDALE, CALIFORNIA

LETTER OF THE YEAR

Blender, I love you and want you to have my babies!

LUCY KWON, ORADELL, NEW JERSEY

Hey, look after them yourself!

COLD COMFORT

I'm an Alaska-native Eskimo who really hates winter, and time always goes so damned slow when the season arrives. But now that I'm receiving your magazine every two months, I have something to look forward to, which will make time seem to pass a little faster.

ALBERT ATCHAK, VIA E-MAIL

IF POP STARS WERE DOGS...

Sammi, the dog

Pink, the pop star

DOES YOUR DOG RESEMBLE A POP STAR?

If the answer is yes, send a photo with your name, address and who your dog is supposed to be to *Blender* at the address below. If we print yours, you'll win an iRiver iHP-120 MP3 player/FM tuner that holds 600 hours of music. *Yup, yup!*

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GOOD NAME FOR A BAND! >>

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David Drebin (Jet); INF/Goff (Fraiture and Moretti); Christina Helms (Sammi); Chris Pizzello/WireImage.com (Pink)

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NEXT ISSUE

COURTNEY OPENS HER HEART

DRUGS. MADNESS. AND FRANCES BEAN

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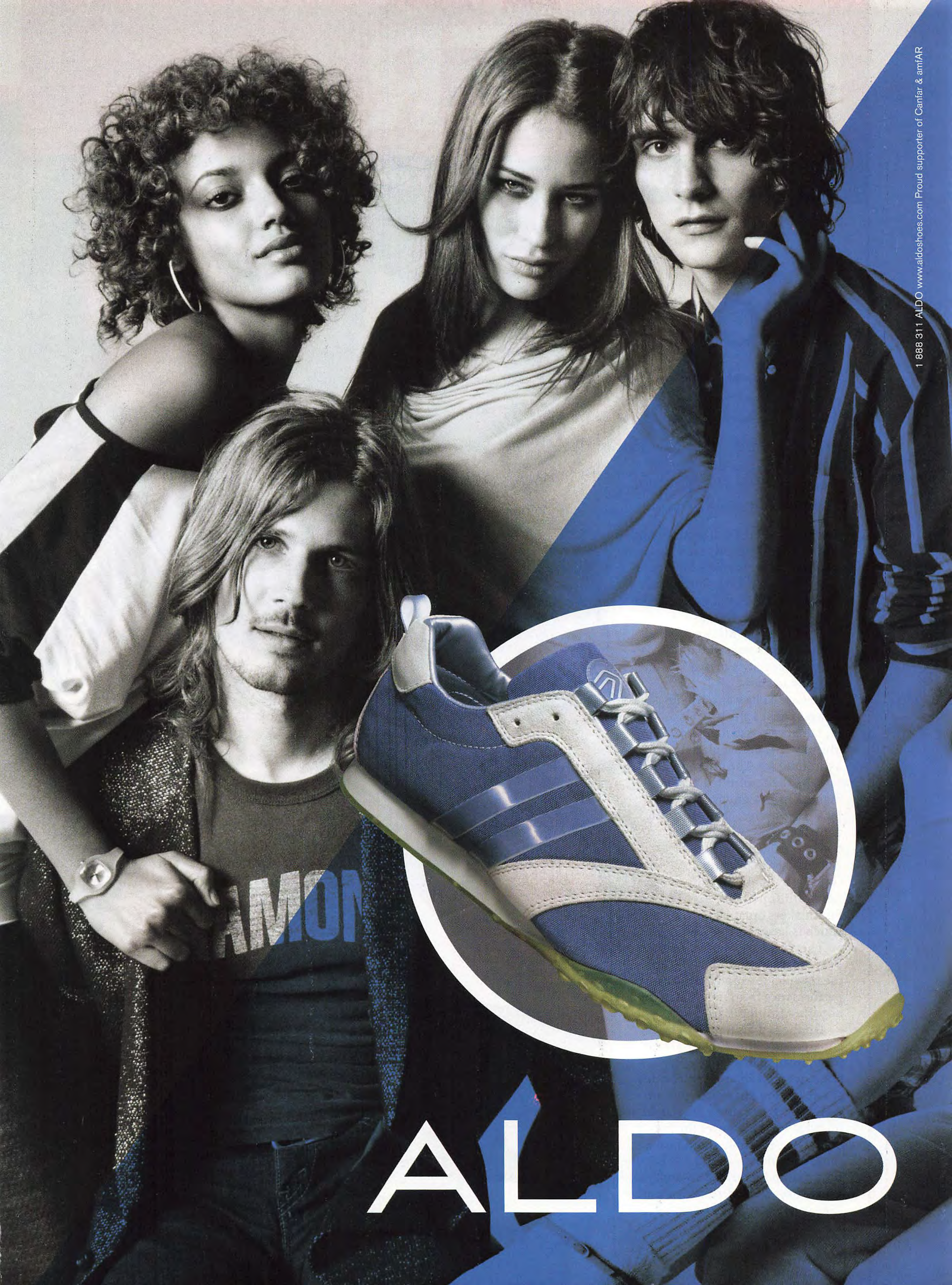
David LaChapelle/Virgin

+ THE

50 WORST SONGS OF ALL TIME!

ON SALE TUESDAY, APRIL 27



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★ ROCK STAR BECOMES WOMAN ★ JOHNNY KNOXVILLE: GRAVEROBBER? >>

Snow Party!

Nelly, Paris Hilton, Macy Gray and more turn out for five days of spectacular *Blender* gigs at the Sundance Film Festival

★ MORE USED TO it getting "hot in herre," Nelly seemed taken aback by conditions at this year's Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah, where he kicked off a series of five *Blender* Sessions shows.

"I'm from the Midwest," he announced onstage at Park City's filled-to-capacity Harry O's. "I'm not used to snow!"

In fact, Nelly was only supposed to host a show by his St. Lunatics posse member Murphy Lee, but he played a 45-minute set. The other nights saw equally committed performances from a guitar-fondling Liz Phair, Irish rockers mrnorth and Macy Gray, who claimed that she walked from Los Angeles to play the concert, a benefit for the nonprofit Inner-City Filmmakers organization, which is based in L.A.

The showcase evening for Pete Yorn's Trampoline Records, meanwhile, featured a surprise performance from movie-star pop hopeful Minnie Driver.

On the last night, classic-rock supergroup Camp Freddy played for a crowd that, as with every show, was not short on celebrities (Paris Hilton, Sharon Stone and Amy Smart, to name a few, could be found at Harry O's over the five days). "We probably should have rehearsed more — but that's half the fun," Camp Freddy's Billy Duffy told a bleary-eyed *Blender* the next day. "See you next year!" CLARK COLLIS

Nelly

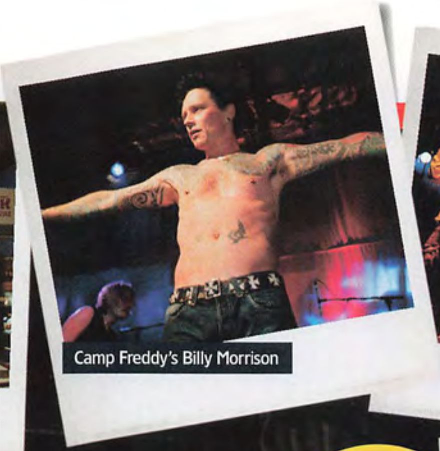
Macy Gray

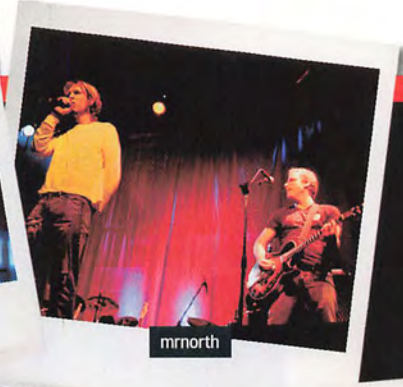
Liz Phair

From left: Nick Carter, Paris Hilton, matchbox twenty's Rob Thomas and his wife, Marisol

Kevin Mazur/WireImage.com (Nelly, 2, Gray, Phair); Larry Busacca/WireImage.com (Carter, Hilton, Thomas and Thomas)

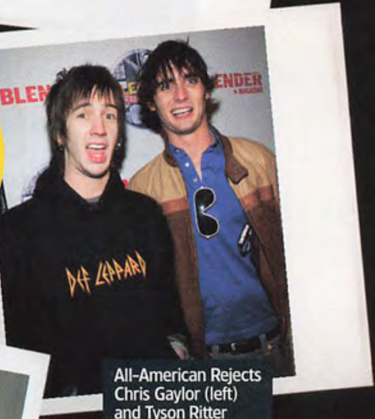
Harry O's: "No, this isn't the David Lynch retrospective."


Camp Freddy's Billy Morrison

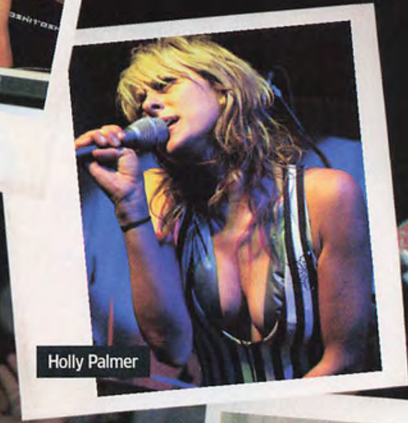

mrnorth

BLENDER SESSIONS!

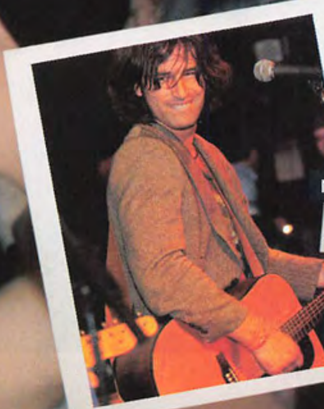
Sharon Stone

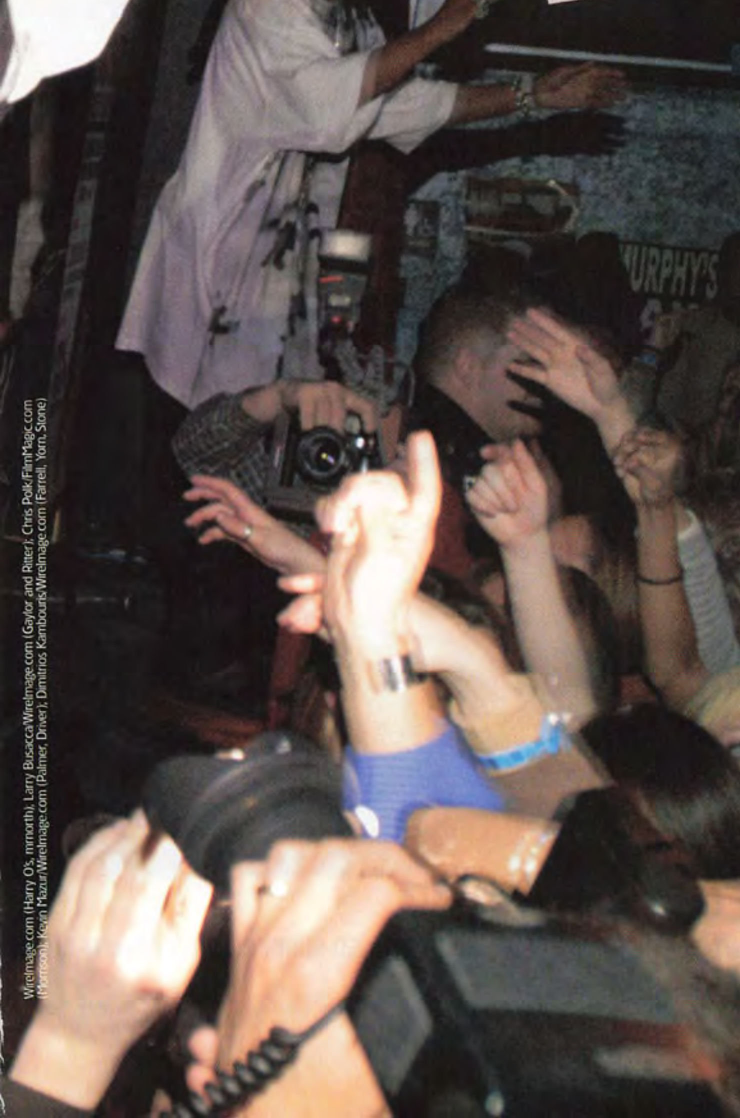

All-American Rejects Chris Gaylor (left) and Tyson Ritter

Perry Farrell


Holly Palmer

Minnie Driver

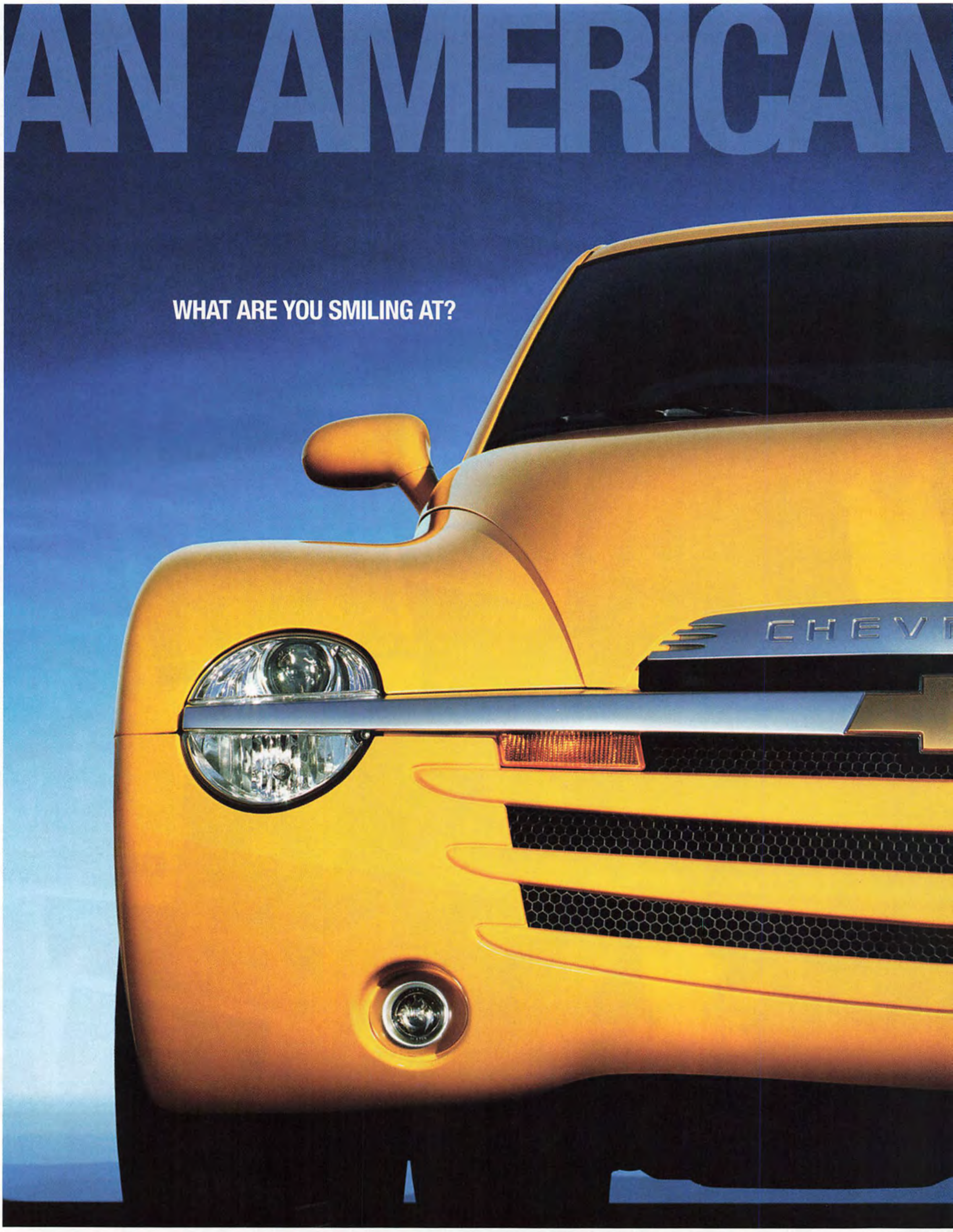

Pete Yorn



WireImage.com (Harry O's, mrnorth), Larry Busacca/WireImage.com (Gaylor and Ritter); Chris Polk/FilmMagic.com (Morrison); Kevin Mazur/WireImage.com (Palmer, Driver); Dimitrios Kambouris/WireImage.com (Farrell, Yorn, Stone)

"Making my connection as I enter the room/Everybody's chillin' and I set up the groove" 29

AN AMERICAN



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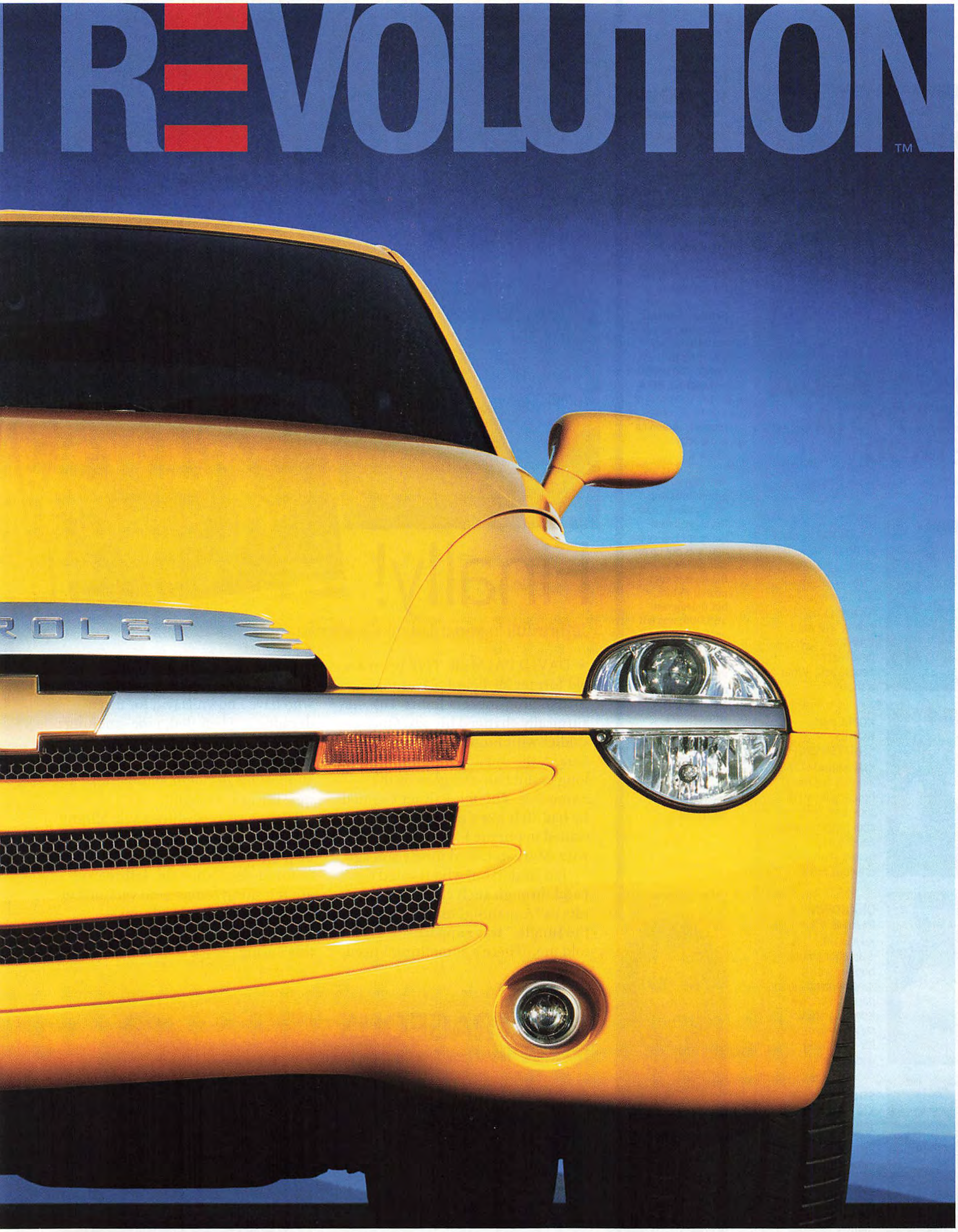

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What's in Your Bag?

From left: Scott Kirkland, Ken Jordan

THE CRYSTAL METHOD

Satellite Records, 259 Bowery, New York

ADAM FREELAND
NOW & THEN

SCOTT KIRKLAND: " 'We Want Your Soul' is my favorite. It's got a kids' choir yelling 'We want your soul!' Every time we play it, people ask, 'What is that?' "

KOMA AND BONES
SHUTTERSPEED

KEN JORDAN: "This album's got hard house rollers. It's slick, too. They use cool programming, and it's a lot harder than their previous work."

UNKNOWN
PLAN B #2

KIRKLAND: "This is an anonymous bootleg with a mesmerizing piano part that comes from *The Shawshank Redemption.* It's a soothing dance track."

SOUL OF MAN
KICKBACK

JORDAN: "This is a fantastic breakbeat track with a rhythmic vocal sample that's sequenced to be part of the percussion. It's synth yet organic." SARAH WILSON

→ THE CRYSTAL METHOD'S NEW ALBUM, *LEGION OF BOOM (V2)*, IS AVAILABLE NOW.

NEWS ROUNDUP!

PRINCE CHARLES sent OZZY OSBOURNE a bottle of whiskey following his recent all-terrain-vehicle accident. The singer is a recovering alcoholic.

BECK is giving away his pet rabbit, Rocket, in a competition. Entrants must write an essay about why they would be the best owner. The animal-rights group PETA has voiced concern that Beck is not properly screening prospective owners.

THE BEASTIE BOYS' groundbreaking record label, Grand Royal, declared bankrupt two years ago, was put up for sale online. Bid4assets.com posted 15 bids, but the highest, $65,000, was not enough to meet the reserve price.

KID ROCK is planning to record an album of duets with SHERYL CROW, but he stresses that the two are not lovers. "Me and Sheryl are friends," he said. "She's got a boyfriend."

WORD!

"I was in Vegas and it took over me; things got out of hand. Do you realize we landed on Mars that day?"

BRITNEY SPEARS, ON HER NUPTIALS

Dee Palmer: formerly bearded, bosomless

Jethro Tull, circa 1978

Finally!

Jethro Tull keyboardist now a woman

★ DAVID PALMER, THE 66-year-old former keyboard player for British prog-rockers Jethro Tull, has surgically changed his sex. Once a soldier with England's Royal Horse Guard, the musician now sports long blond hair and goes by the name Dee. Though Palmer claimed he had "felt like this since age 3," he waited to pursue his dream until his wife, Margaret, died nine years ago.

Ian Anderson, who fronted the band through such classic 1970s hits as "Aqualung" and "Bungle in the Jungle," was supportive. "He told me, 'There's something I need to get off my increasingly ample chest,' " Anderson said. "Like many who have known David for three decades as a bearded, pipe-smoking man's man, I found it difficult to understand at first. But I fully support his decision to undertake a new life as a woman."

Palmer is recording a solo album under her new persona. "I want to be judged on my musical ability and nothing else," she said. Jethro Tull are reissuing remastered versions of three of their classic albums — *Bursting Out, Stormwatch* and *A* — this spring. SUZANNE ELY

OUTRAGEOUS

Taping sexual assaulter Mystikal jailed

RAPPER MYSTIKAL (born Michael Taylor), 33, was sentenced to six years in jail for forcing his 40-year-old hairstylist to perform continuous sex acts on him and his two bodyguards. An explicit videotape he made of the crime was used as evidence.

The victim was assaulted in July 2002, after Taylor falsely accused her of stealing $80,000 in personal checks. After charges were pressed, he paid her $350,000 — $300,000 borrowed from his label, Jive. STEVE KANDELL

Mystikal: The self-proclaimed Black Elvis's new LP, *Prince of the South,* has been indefinitely shelved.

Tim Soter (the Crystal Method, 5); Mirrorpix (Palmer); Michael Ochs Archives.com (Jethro Tull); Clay Patrick McBride/Retna Ltd. (Mystikal); Gary French (illustration)

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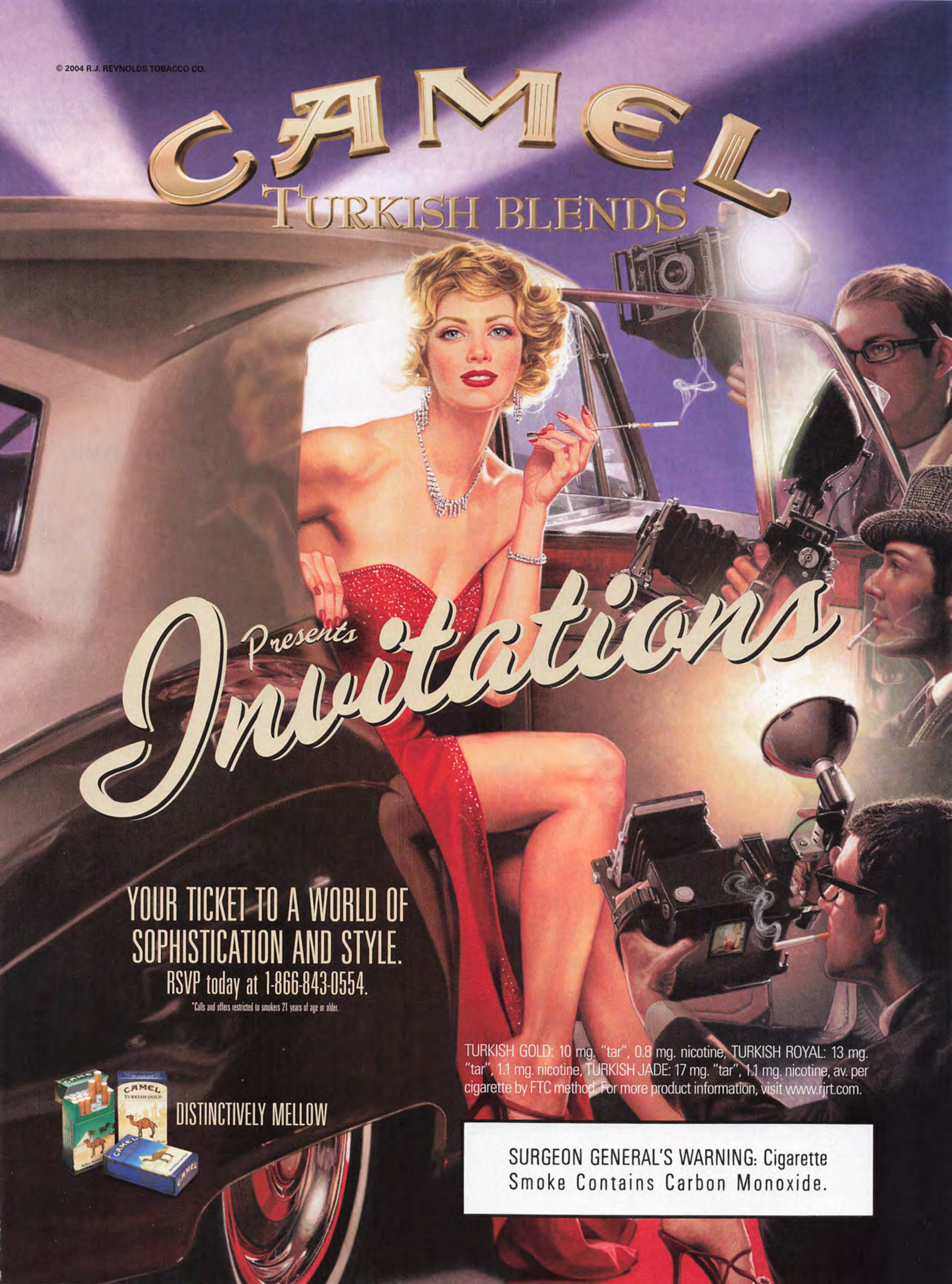

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The Next Big Thing!

JEM

Having written a song for Madonna, this Welsh singer is going solo

BY NICK DUERDEN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY PEROU

>> WHEN JEM TURNED 13, she made a decision. She would write some songs, secure a deal and sell lots of albums. That is, after she went to law school. "It's not because I was particularly driven," she says over pineapple juice one Saturday afternoon in her local West London pub. "It just seemed logical."

Now Jem (born Jemma Griffiths), from Cardiff, Wales, is on schedule. At age 28, she has just released her debut, *Finally Woken,* a sublime album of hip-hop-influenced folk that sounds a little like Beth Orton — in sneakers rather than sandals, and much funkier.

Jem did study law, though she says she spent more time promoting club nights than showing up to class. After graduating, she began actively seeking a record deal. After three slow years in London, she was introduced to Madonna producer Guy Sigsworth, who was writing a love song for his wife.

Jem gave him "Nothing Fails." Sigsworth loved it so much, he passed it on to his employer, who recorded it for her album *American Life.* "It's very strange to hear your song being sung by somebody else," she says, "but I think Madonna's version is quite beautiful."

But Jem's biggest break came rather incongruously one morning two years ago in Los Angeles. "I was washing up the breakfast dishes and listening to this radio station, KCRW," she recounts, "and the DJ [Nic Harcourt] was playing the most amazing music. So on an impulse, I went down to the studio with my demo."

The influential Harcourt played her incessantly, which brought her music to the attention of Dave Matthews — "a lovely guy, my mentor," she says. Now she writes songs day and night, and looks everywhere for influence.

"I've only just discovered *OK Computer,*" she says, beaming. "Aren't Radiohead incredible?" She laughs and drinks some juice. "I tend to write pretty straightforward songs, but if I ever become more obscure, you can be sure it's Thom Yorke's fault!" [BLENDER]

>>> OUT NOW FINALLY WOKEN *ATO*

[A sublime album of hip-hop-influenced folk.]

ALL ABOUT ME!

FULL GIVEN NAME
Jemma Griffiths

BIRTHDATE
May 18, 1975

OBSESSION
"Buying CDs and vinyl."

WOULD DIE TO MEET
"The late, great comedian Bill Hicks."

MOST ANNOYING COMPARISON MADE BY THE PRESS
"Dido. We both have softish voices, but musically I think we're quite different."

FAVORITE SONG RIGHT NOW
" 'Exit Music (For a Film),' by Radiohead."

MOST DIVA-LIKE DEMAND
"Hot water."

JEANS BY CARHARTT

Photography by Perou, perou.co.uk. Styling: Deep; assistant to wardrobe stylist: D. Jones; hair and makeup: Marco Antonio Texeira

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I see London, I see France, I see Paris's lack of underpants.

PARIS NOT ABLE TO KEEP HER CLOTHES ON IN PUBLIC

IS THE NEW

PARIS NOT ABLE TO KEEP HER CLOTHES ON IN PRIVATE

AND OTHER LATE-BREAKING DEVELOPMENTS

Bands covering "Hey Ya!"	is the new	Bands covering ". . . Baby One More Time"
Pregnant-baby-mama-leaver Billy Crudup	is the new	Pregnant-baby-mama-beater Ike Turner
Bird flu	is the new	Monkeypox
U.S. invading Mars	is the new	U.S. invading Iraq
HowWasShe.com	is the new	HotOrNot.com
Ben Affleck spending most of his time in casinos, strip clubs	is the new	Ben Affleck spending a lot of his time in casinos, strip clubs
"Watching *The Office* makes me really queasy"	is the new	"Watching *Curb Your Enthusiasm* makes me really queasy"
Movies with hot man-on-man action	is the new	Movies with hot girl-on-girl action
Howard Dean	is the new	Incredible Hulk

NEWS ROUNDUP!

American Idol host **SIMON COWELL** has described Madonna as a "housewife" who "used to be good-looking."

The mother of **MICHAEL JACKSON**'s first two children, Prince Michael and Paris, is worried that the Nation of Islam, the star's anti-Semitic confidantes, may convert them. The children are both Jewish by birth.

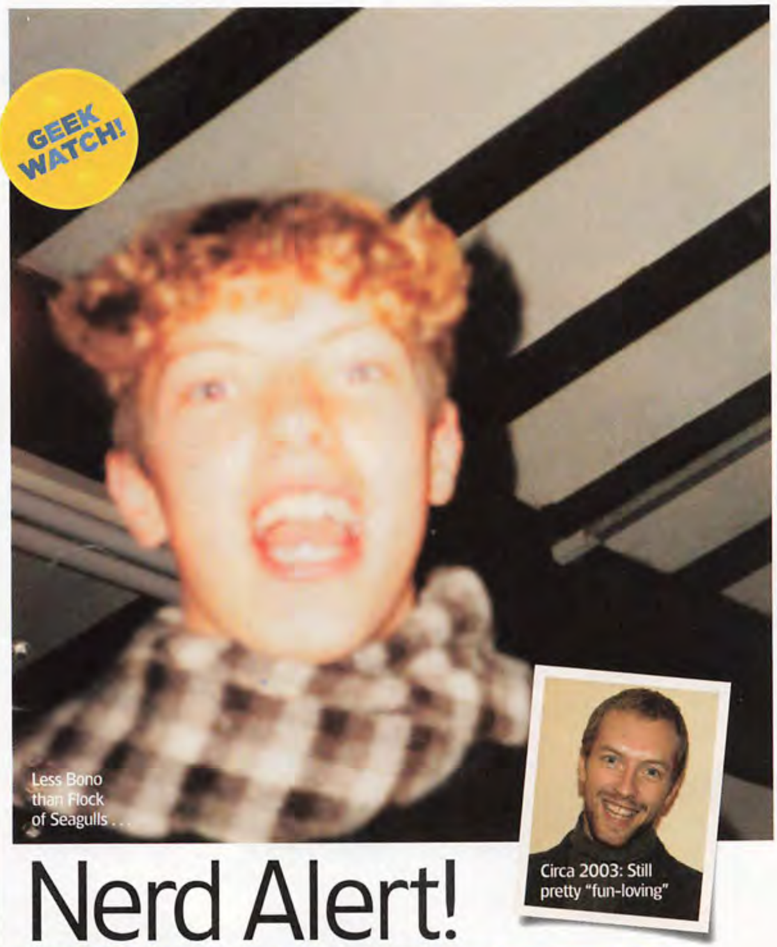
BRAD PITT has dressed up as "Wild Boys"–era **SIMON LE BON** for his wife, **JENNIFER ANISTON**. The *Friends* star revealed her teenage infatuation with the Duran Duran frontman after the couple bumped into him while shopping in Los Angeles.

Record companies are now permitted to put **FBI LOGO** stickers on CD packaging to discourage consumers from illegal copying.

WORD!

> **"I went up there, got up onstage, did some song and peed my pants."**
>
> SHANIA TWAIN, ON THE FIRST TIME SHE PLAYED LIVE

GEEK WATCH!



Less Bono than Flock of Seagulls . . .

Circa 2003: Still pretty "fun-loving"

Nerd Alert!

Coldplay's Chris Martin was once a juggling unicyclist

★ *BLENDER* HAS discovered a photo in which Coldplay frontman Chris Martin, then 17 years old, flaunts a geeky coif.

A former classmate of Martin's at the prestigious private English boarding school Sherborne released the photo for public merriment.

"While everyone else was only interested in getting as drunk as possible on cider, Martin was notorious for unicycling and juggling around his boarding house," the classmate noted. PHIL SUTCLIFFE

Weird Band Alert!

THE IRON MAIDENS

Five L.A. women who worship, and play the songs of, Iron Maiden

When they perform, it's in color.

IS THIS TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE?

Yes, the band is a headbanger's heavy-metal tailgate fantasy. The Iron Maidens are a "world-class all-female act" from Los Angeles who play the songs of Iron Maiden note-for-note in a set that lasts almost two hours.

COMPLETE WITH GUITAR SOLOS?

The women, all in their thirties, are highly trained professionals ready to rock full-throttle solos. "Our lead guitarist [Sara 'MiniMurray' Marsh] studied guitar from metal legend Alex Skolnick of Testament," says drummer Linda "Nikki McBurrain" McDonald, whose bandmates also include Jenny "Bruce Chickinson" Warren on vocals, Josephine "Adrianne Smith" Draven on guitar and Wanda "Steph Harris" Ortiz on bass.

ISN'T THIS SACRILEGE? HOW ARE MAIDEN FANS REACTING?

"We sell out just about every show," McDonald says. "We opened for Danzig in Vegas, and we've played Cypress Hill's Smoke Out Tour. They love to see sweaty girls play rock." ARYE DWORKEN

Splash News (Hilton); courtesy of Tom Rawstorne (Martin); Kevin Mazur/WireImage.com (Martin, inset; Affleck); courtesy of the Iron Maidens (Iron Maidens); Kobal Collection (the Hulk); Tannen Maury/EPA/Newscom.com (Dean); Dimitrios Kambouris/WireImage.com (Andre 3000); Gary French (illustration)

CARL HYNDMAN PHOTO.
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Pop star must-have: A face like a Muppet

RING RING!

Ryan Adams leaves a nasty message on a critic's voicemail!

RYAN ADAMS HAS begun his first feud of the New Year, responding to an article by writer Jim DeRogatis with a defensive voicemail.

Reviewing his December show at Chicago's Riviera Theatre for the *Chicago Sun-Times,* DeRogatis called Adams a "poseur" who was "acting out the whole tired 'troubled artist' routine." The headline read NOTE TO RYAN ADAMS: WISH YOU WERE ANYWHERE BUT HERE.

Adams, 29, then phoned DeRogatis. After claiming, "I'm not giving you a Courtney Love call," Adams launched into a two-and-a-half-minute verbal assault, saying, "Fuck you, you asshole. You're probably old, and you probably just need to retire."

Jim DeRogatis, rock critic

DeRogatis, 38, who broke the story of the R. Kelly underage-sex scandal, posted the message on the Internet. Adams responded on his Web site: "That phone call was personal, just like the personal attack against me in the paper, and to let it out shows you what kind of person he is."

"He seems to have a bit of a persecution complex. But all debate is healthy," DeRogatis countered.

Adams, who at the Riviera show played four consecutive renditions of his song "Wish You Were Here" — one in a Cookie Monster voice — threatened to call again whenever DeRogatis dissed him in print. STEVE LOWE

> **Adams played "Wish You Were Here" four times, once in a Cookie Monster voice.**
>
> ★

NEWS ROUNDUP!

ART GARFUNKEL has been charged with marijuana possession. An officer pulled over the singer's car in upstate New York and noticed a fragrant aroma. The 62-year-old allegedly had a bag of the drug in his jacket pocket.

ASHANTI had to be ushered offstage while performing in Nigeria to save her from lusty male fans who took to the stage after the singer, clad in hot pants, performed a lascivious dance with a member of the audience.

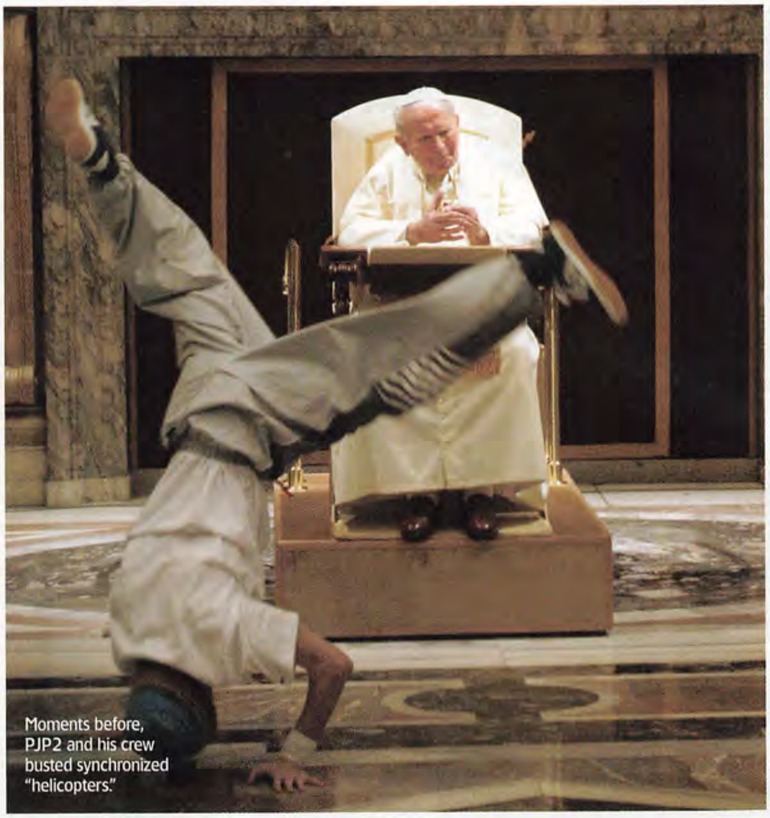
WILLIAM SHATNER, Captain Kirk on *Star Trek*, has recorded a new album featuring BEN FOLDS, JOE JACKSON and hardcore legend HENRY ROLLINS.

MARIAH CAREY recently performed at a chiropractic convention in Las Vegas. She shared the bill with *Taxi* actress and health expert Marilu Henner.

WORD!

"David likes me bigger. I'd love to have a bigger bum."

VICTORIA BECKHAM


Moments before, PJP2 and his crew busted synchronized "helicopters."

Vatican Boogaloo!

Polish breakdancers astonish the Pope at the Holy See

★ A TROUPE OF breakdancers recently amazed Pope John Paul II by spinning, sailing and leaping around the Vatican.

As a tiny boom box played beats, the 83-year-old Holy Father watched from a throne, waving his hands and clapping as each dancer finished his solo.

"For this creative hard work, I bless you from my heart," he cheered after the dancers shook and squeaked across the Vatican's marble floor.

The dancers, a Polish youth group that helps poor and troubled teens, had been invited to Rome for a special performance. NOEL BODDIE

MESSY!

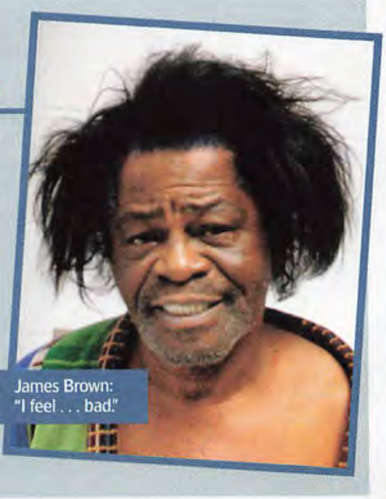
James Brown nabbed for wife abuse

JAMES BROWN CLAIMS an argument with his wife, which ended with his arrest on suspicion of domestic violence in January, started when she allegedly told him she had never divorced her previous husband.

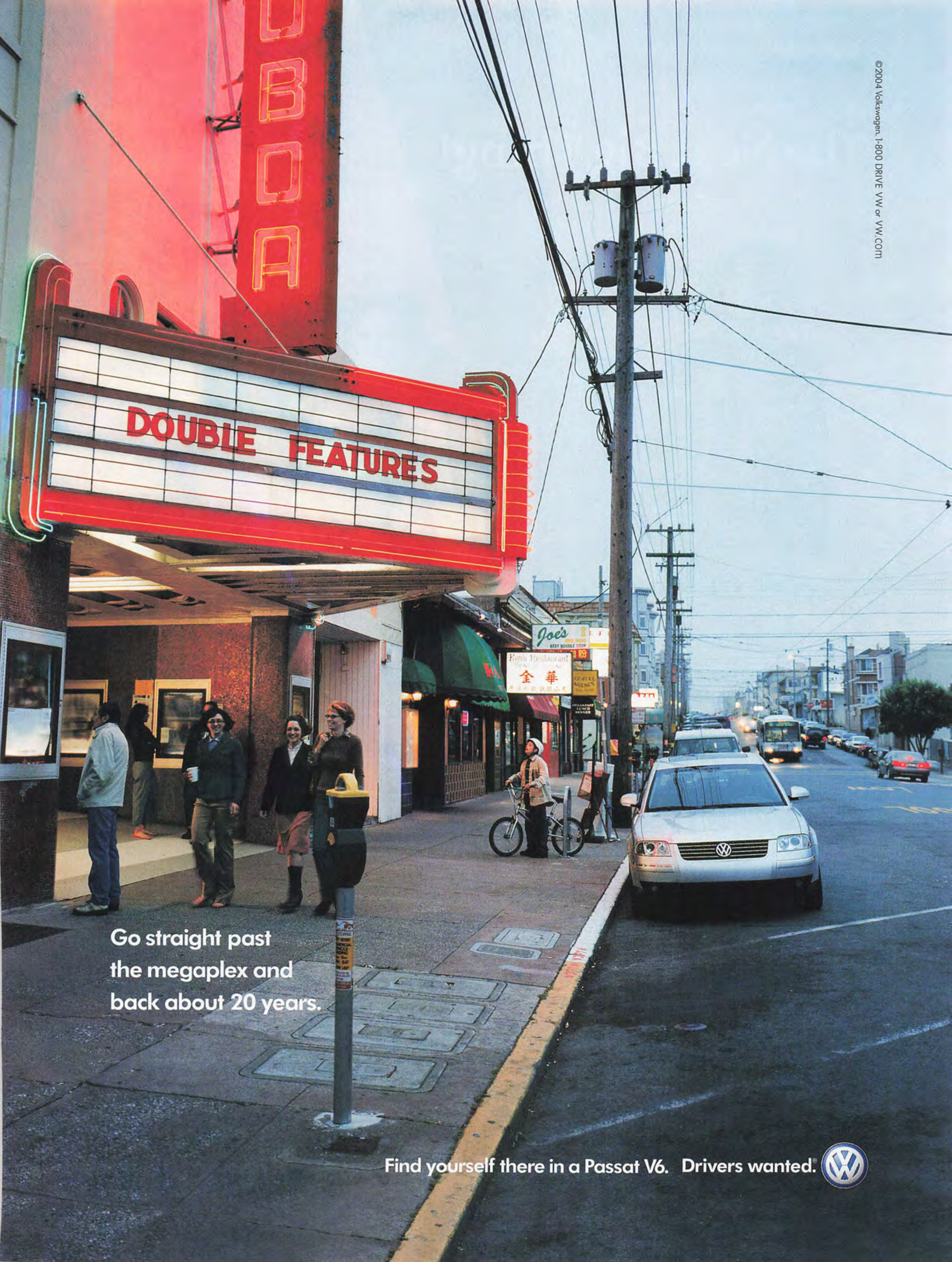
Tomi Rae Brown, 33, Brown's wife of three years, was treated for scratches and bruises after Brown allegedly shoved her.

When asked if he and his wife would stay together, the Godfather of Soul said, "I'm ready to go to work. I've gotta go to the U.N. I'm going to see about saving our country. That's first — God and country."

Brown has since filed marriage-annulment papers. NOEL BODDIE


James Brown: "I feel . . . bad."

Bruno Vincent/Getty Images (Adams); photo courtesy Vatican via Getty Images/Newscom (Pope); Pool Photographer/WireImage.com (Brown)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The Next Big Thing!

ON STOLLSTEIMER: SHIRT BY **LEVI'S**; JEANS BY **DIESEL**. ON SMITH: VINTAGE SHIRT; PANTS BY **THE GAP**; SHOES BY **CONVERSE**. ON BOLEN: VINTAGE SHIRT; JEANS BY **LEVI'S**. ON BLUM: SHIRT BY **LE TIGRE**; JEANS BY **LEVI'S**

[An album of "voodoo-y" blues and swampy garage rock.]

The Von Bondies, from left: Jason Stollsteimer, Carrie Smith, Marcie Bolen, Don Blum

THE VON BONDIES

→ After a brawl with Jack White, this Detroit band prefers to talk about its music

BY NICK DUERDEN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL LAVINE

>> LAST DECEMBER 13, a Saturday, Von Bondies frontman Jason Stollsteimer went to the Magic Stick nightclub in his native Detroit.

At the club, he ran into Jack White, and a fight ensued in which the White Stripes' leader repeatedly punched Stollsteimer in the face, sending him to the hospital.

Three days after the melee, *Blender* finds Stollsteimer, on doctor's orders, resting in bed.

"Look, *Blender* is about music, right?" he says, irritated at our curiosity about the brawl. "When I've spoken to you guys before, you've never shown any interest in, say, what my mom does for a living — so why the sudden interest in my private life?"

Getting punched to the floor by a famous singer, *Blender* explains, is a bit more newsworthy than his mother's day job. Stollsteimer grunts. "We've got a new album out, *Pawn Shoppe Heart*," he says. "It's pretty great. Let's talk about that."

All right, but first a bit of background.

The Von Bondies — Stollsteimer, guitarist Marcie Bolen, bassist Carrie Smith and drummer Don Blum, all in their mid-twenties — got together in 1999, and their 2001 debut, *Lack of Communication*, was coproduced by White, who later took them on tour. The Von Bondies then watched the White Stripes go on to international glory while they remained a cult act. But all this, Stollsteimer insists, is about to change.

"People have always said we are amazing live," he says, "and I think this new record captures that essence completely."

ALL ABOUT US!

PERSON WE'D DIE TO MEET
"Bill Murray."

FAVORITE SONG RIGHT NOW
" 'Hey Ya!' by Outkast."

WON'T TOUR WITHOUT . . .
"The rest of the band. No one is replaceable."

FAVORITE MOVIE ON THE TOUR BUS
"*Battle Royale* or *The Song Remains the Same*."

BEST THING ABOUT DETROIT
"The thrift shops."

PREFERRED PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE
"Not Bush. How about Junior or Senior?"

Their swampy garage rock is often compared to that of the Strokes, as well as their current nemesis. "We sound nothing like any of those guys," Stollsteimer counters. "The Strokes' songs are calculated. They sound like something you learn in school. And the White Stripes? They're blues. We're more . . . " He frowns and then grins. ". . . We're more voodoo-y blues, you know?"

Voodoo-y? "Sure, sure," Stollsteimer says. "Voodoo-y." [BLENDER]

>>> **OUT NOW** **PAWN SHOPPE HEART** *SIRE*

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The tie is tight, and she's holdin' on. . . .

Do You Rock?

Debbie Harry

Does Blondie's punk icon and one-time nitrous-oxide huffer . . . rock?

Ever trashed a hotel room?
In Florida, it was really hot, but the room was freezing. So I opened a sliding door. At the same time, I turned on the TV, and it exploded.

Largest number of people you've woken up next to in a hotel bed?
Probably five or six.

Best rumor about yourself?
That I was living in an old-age home. I probably *should* be, but fuck it.

Biggest celeb's home you've gotten drunk in?
Either Steve Martin's or Elton John's.

Brush with the law?
Just normal things like getting busted or getting picked up for bad behavior.

Ever been declared legally dead?
No, but I was in a coma once.

Worst rock & roll injury?
I once cracked my nose and injured my back running into a glass door.

Ever driven a car into a pool?
No, but I have raced cars on a frozen lake in upstate New York.

Worst place you've been sick?
Someone's bed.

Worst tour horror story?
We had a maniac roadie in Australia. He'd eat bugs and drink piss.

Best high?
Adrenaline, from doing something really scary.

Craziest rider clause?
Oxygen and laughing gas. *DAVE HILL*

VERDICT

SHE'S CLUMSY AND RACES CARS ON ICY LAKES? DEBBIE HARRY ROCKS!

→ BLONDIE'S NEW ALBUM, *THE CURSE OF BLONDIE* (SANTUARY), IS OUT NOW.

NEWS ROUNDUP!

According to sources, BRITNEY SPEARS's ex-husband, Jason Alexander, agreed to the annulment of their Las Vegas marriage only after being paid $540,000.

NICOLE RICHIE has been reunited with her biological father, Peter Michael Escovedo III, the bandleader on *The Wayne Brady Show* and brother of '80s star Sheila E. The reality-TV star's real parents agreed to give her up to LIONEL RICHIE and his wife, Brenda, when she was a toddler.

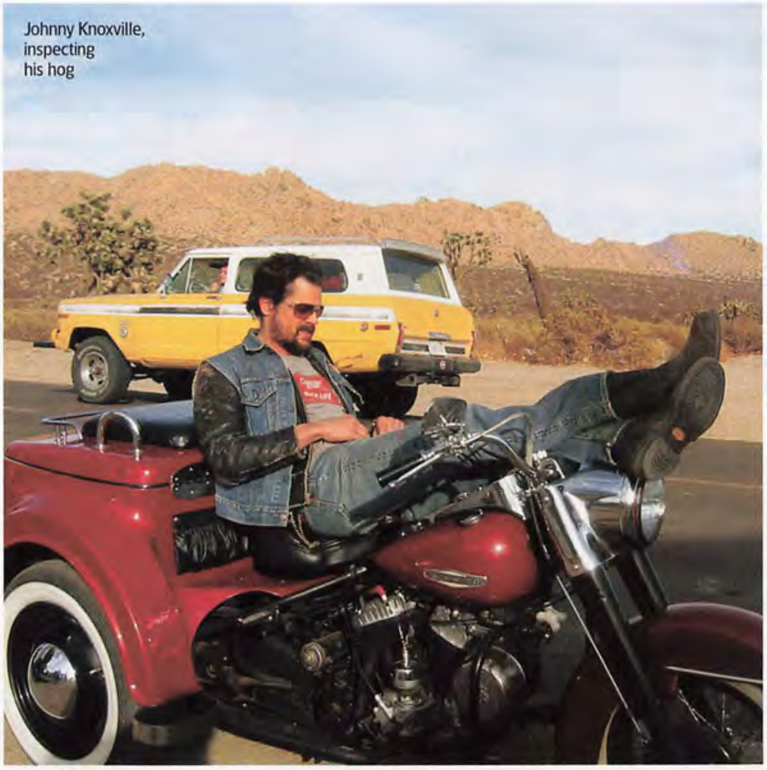
R. KELLY, currently battling charges of videotaping sex with underage girls, is in talks to score a musical of the Sylvester Stallone boxing classic *Rocky*.

CHRISTINA AGUILERA has said she likes casual sex and going to strip clubs. She also considers women "more sexy" than men. "Got a problem with that? Fuck you," she said.

WORD!

"I am so far from being an asshole, I almost feel like Mother Teresa with a Glock."

TED NUGENT



Johnny Knoxville, inspecting his hog

Snatch'd!

Johnny Knoxville plays Gram Parsons's body stealer

★ *JACKASS*'S JOHNNY Knoxville steals a corpse and transports it through the desert in his upcoming movie *Grand Theft Parsons*, a (more or less) true account of manager Phil Kaufman's 1973 quest to abscond with the body of Gram Parsons.

The country-rocker, who had died of a drug overdose, had made a pact with his friend and manager to have his body buried in California's Joshua Tree National Park. "We had no time and no money, and we did the best we could," Knoxville said.

Kaufman gave the movie, due later this year, his seal of approval and loaned Knoxville the jacket he wore while nabbing Parsons's body. "It reminded me of *Smokey and the Bandit*," said Polly Parsons, Gram's daughter. *STEVE KANDELL*

Pop Star Must-Have

MUPPETS!

Fuzzy friends of Jim Henson don't steal money or spouses. They're trustworthy and cuddly!

Ruben Studdard

Norah Jones

Elton John

Sheryl Crow

Tony Bennett

Clockwise from top left: Rankin/Camera Press/Retna Ltd.; David Caffrey; Theo Wargo/WireImage.com (3); Rex USA; Theo Wargo/WireImage.com; Gary French (illustration)

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True love, on the rocks

GORY!

Dave Navarro gets stiff with wife Carmen Electra

CARMEN ELECTRA and Dave Navarro, stars of MTV's reality show *'Til Death Do Us Part: Carmen and Dave,* posed as cadavers in a morgue for their November 2003 wedding invitations. "Not everyone got [the joke]," Electra said. The photos were used instead for their joint bachelor/bachelorette party.

Navarro has a history of gore-loving wives. In 1990, he married a woman identified as "Tanja." During their pagan wedding ceremony, they cut their palms to exchange blood. In 1994, he married Catherine Rhian Signe (for three weeks) and carved her name into his pierced breast for the cover of an early solo demo. Electra's 1998 marriage to Dennis Rodman lasted five months. *NOEL BODDIE*

Judas Priest with Dave Holland (second from right)

GUILTY

Judas Priest ex-drummer molested handicapped boy

DAVID HOLLAND, former drummer for Judas Priest, was found guilty of the attempted rape of a handicapped teen under his care for drum lessons. Holland, 55, committed the sexual crimes between July and December 2002 at his Northampton, England, house.

The 17-year-old boy, who remains anonymous, testified that when Holland tried to rape him, he ran away "to a warm corner of a cottage." Holland was also accused of forcing him to watch porn while touching and kissing him. His parents said they wanted the lessons to help boost their son's self-esteem. *LAUREN HARRIS*

NEWS ROUNDUP!

EVANESCENCE's Amy Lee has apologized for announcing the breakup of fellow rockers Cold before the band itself knew of the matter. "I just wanted to say that really sucked of me," she wrote on her band's Web site.

Tenacious D's JACK BLACK says he has "made peace" with his body after years of trying to lose weight. "I'm OK with my weight now," he claimed. "My main problem is that I'm an insomniac."

MY MORNING JACKET guitarist Johnny Quaid and keyboardist Danny Cash have split from the band, citing homesickness. "My country ass is now ready to go the fuck home," Quaid said.

According to medical reports, the death of Righteous Brother BOBBY HATFIELD was caused partly by cocaine. The death certificate, which previously cited only heart failure, will be updated to include the new findings.

WORD!

"I don't have any hobbies besides making music, taking loads of drugs and reading."

RYAN ADAMS

The Hives: Penguins! Brilliant!

In the Studio

"We Argue a Lot!"

Tiffs, the Sex Pistols and Kraftwerk inspire the new record by Sweden's best garage band — the result, they say, is "brilliant"

★ "WE HAVE BEEN having lots of technical breakdowns in the studio," says Hives frontman Pelle Almqvist. "It doesn't help. It creates tension, and tension creates arguments."

Arguments, it transpires, are typical of the band's studio-bound existence. "We do argue a lot," Almqvist says, "but these are creative arguments. It means everybody is keeping focused."

The five Swedes are currently holed up in Stockholm's Studio Gröndahl with coproducer Pelle Gunnerfeldt, working on the follow-up to 2002's *Veni Vidi Vicious,* which sold 400,000 copies in the United States.

"We are influenced by the Sex Pistols and Kraftwerk," Almqvist says, "but this doesn't mean that we sound like them, because we sound only like the Hives."

The working title is succinct: *The Record.* "Even if we knew what we were going to call it, we wouldn't tell," he explains, "because we wouldn't want to spoil the surprise."

Since forming in 1994, the quintet — Almqvist, guitarists Nicholaus Arson and Vigilante Carlstroem, bassist Dr. Matt Destruction and drummer Chris Dangerous, all operating under pseudonyms and all around 25 years old — have put their success down to their sharp dress sense (they favor matching outfits) and their music, which they consider "the most important thing in the world."

"We've always had too much self-confidence," Almqvist says with a grin, "but that comes from making brilliant music. I expect people to like our new record, because *we* will like our new record." *NICK DUERDEN*

ALL ABOUT OUR ALBUM!

ARTIST	The Hives
STUDIO	Studio Gröndahl, Stockholm
PRODUCERS	The Hives, Pelle Gunnerfeldt
LAST RECORD	*Veni Vidi Vicious* (Sire, 2002)
NEW RECORD	As yet untitled (Due summer 2004)

ALSO IN THE STUDIO

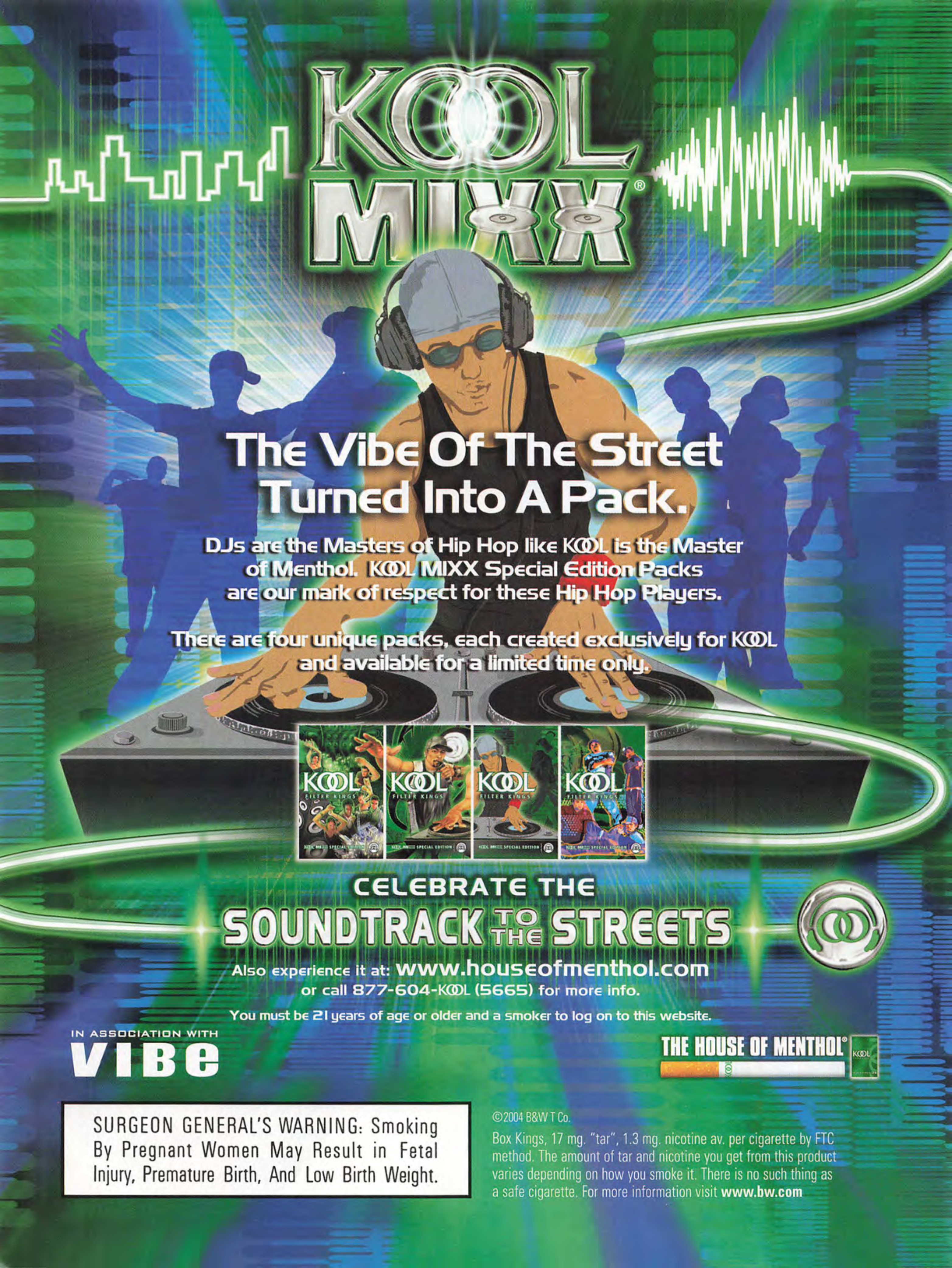
<< Country superstar **FAITH HILL** is in Nashville recording her sixth album, a follow-up to 2002's triple-platinum *Cry.* The album is due in autumn 2004. . . .

Atlanta rappers **LIL JON & EAST SIDE BOYZ** are in Miami recording the follow-up to their double-platinum 2002 album, *Kings of Crunk.* . . .

FATBOY SLIM (a.k.a. Norman Cook) is working on *Fatboy 4* in Brighton, England. Damon Albarn, Bootsy Collins and Blackalicious's Lateef are on the mic. . . .

New York New Wave garage-rockers **RADIO 4** are recording their Astralwerks debut, the follow-up to 2002's *Gotham,* for a May release. . . .

Neal Preston/Corbis (Judas Priest); MTV (Navarro and Electra); Chapman Baehler (the Hives); Gary French (illustration)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HOW TO . . .

Pop a Wheelie!

California rockers and hog enthusiasts **Hoobastank** help you turn your motorcycle into a high-speed unicycle

BY STEVE KANDELL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LEGO

1 GET WHEELS!

DOUG ROBB, VOCALS: "Get yourself a light motorcycle or a dirt bike to start out with. Despite this photo, make sure you're the only person actually on the bike and that the streets are clear of people and cars. Put your helmet on and ride about five to 10 miles an hour. Shift your weight slowly toward the back."

2 GET ATTITUDE!

CHRIS HESSE, DRUMS: "Get your game face on — grit your teeth and look real crazy to show that all-important wheelie attitude. Put the clutch in and the pedal to the metal, then dump the clutch by letting go of the left handle quickly. That will shift all the power to the back and lift the front wheel off the ground."

3 GET SOME AIR!

MARKKU LAPPALAINEN, BASS: "Give it a little gas, and lean back. Depending on the bike, you may not have to lean back at all. I wouldn't recommend going too fast — maybe 15 or 20 miles per hour, although some guys pop wheelies going 90. I can ride about 20 yards on a good day if I'm not too drunk. Hold on and pray!"

4 GET STITCHES!

DAN ESTRIN, GUITAR: "Fuck that. Pile as many friends on the bike as you can, and don't go any slower than 30. You need to look like a circus act. To bring the front wheel back down, just let off the throttle. Definitely wear a helmet. I crashed once while not wearing a helmet and had to have emergency brain surgery."

Hoobastank, from left: Doug Robb, Dan Estrin, Chris Hesse, Markku Lappalainen

→ **HOOBASTANK'S LATEST ALBUM, *THE REASON* (*ISLAND*), IS OUT NOW.**

Hoobastank photographed at Fast Ashleys Studio, Brooklyn, New York. Motorcycle courtesy of Fast Ashleys

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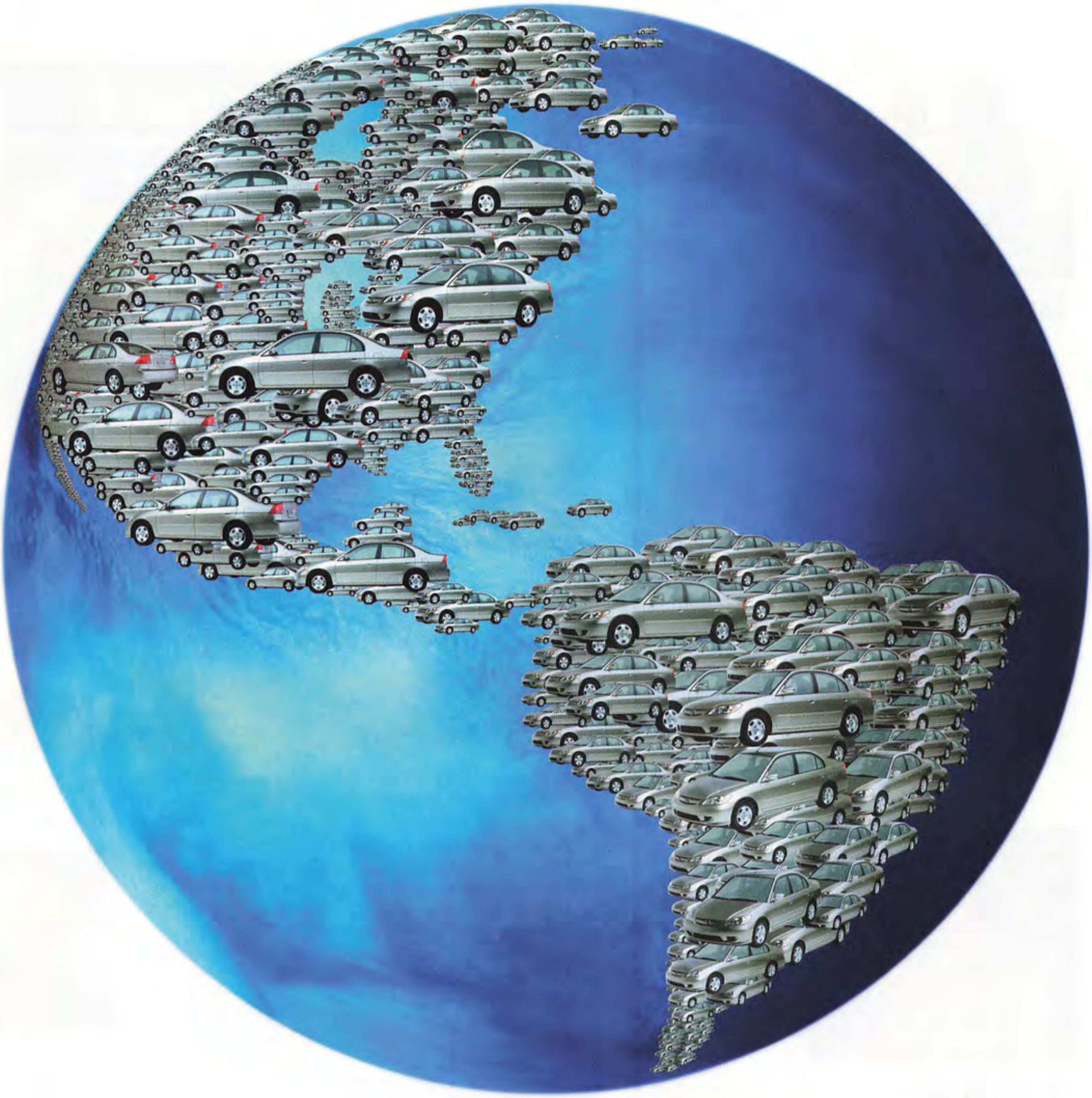

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HONDA

Jack White: "Now is the winter of our discontent."

IT WASN'T ME!

Jack White pleads not guilty to assault charges

WHITE STRIPES FRONTMAN Jack White could face a year in prison and a $1,000 fine if convicted of beating up Von Bondies singer Jason Stollsteimer at the Magic Stick, a Detroit club.

White, who claims Stollsteimer initiated the December incident — despite eyewitness accounts to the contrary — pleaded not guilty to aggravated assault on January 15. White's attorney is negotiating a possible plea deal. A March 9 trial is scheduled.

Meanwhile, said Ryan Sult, the editor of MotorCityRocks.com, White and Stollsteimer have stayed away from Detroit clubs since the incident, and locals are on their best behavior. "People joke that they'll make sure to compliment White Stripes music at all times," he said. *JON REGARDIE*

Avril (left) pulls a "Pink."

G.O.G.A.

Avril Lavigne excites onlookers with girl-on-girl action!

THOUGH AVRIL LAVIGNE lost the 2003 "Favorite Female Artist — Pop or Rock & Roll Music" American Music Award to Jennifer Lopez, she found consolation. According to an eyewitness at the Los Angeles club Forbidden City, site of the post-party, Lavigne and a gal pal "were dancing very hot, very sexual — like girlfriend and boyfriend. Everyone around them was quite excited." Near Lavigne, dancing similarly, were Pink and a female friend. *NOEL BODDIE*

PLAYLIST

The best new songs to download!*

KELIS FEAT. ANDRÉ 3000
"MILLIONAIRE"
This *Tasty* album duet is "Pretty in Pink" run through a crunkifier. He coos and she's all throat, trading post-bling lines about measuring wealth in love.

AMBULANCE LTD.
"ANECDOTE"
NYC's best new retro-rockers wring sadness from cheer in this '60s-style pop lament that would have fit on the *Royal Tenenbaums* soundtrack.

EAMON
"FUCK IT"
Smooth R&B via a $14.99 Casio plays under a chorus that goes "Fuck you, you ho, I don't want you back." From a twentysomething Staten Islander, it's the best breakup rant since Alanis Morissette's "You Oughta Know."

HAL
"WORRY ABOUT THE WIND"
A compelling debut single — from an unknown Dublin quartet — despite ambiguous lyrics, an androgynous vocal line and no chorus at all. *JONAH WEINER*

WORD!

"I don't think I am going to get pregnant. I am trying not to."
JESSICA SIMPSON

Life After Rock

The Clash circa 1982, pre–Village People mania

Terry Chimes

[OF THE CLASH]

THEN!	NOW!
DRUMMER, 1976–1977, 1982–1983	CHIROPRACTOR/CONSULTANT, LONDON

★ "BEING IN THE Clash was very hard work. We were young, 19 or 20, and obsessed with being successful. But there was a culture of working seven days a week, making sure we had the right ideas. It was a very austere working environment. [Late singer-guitarist] Joe Strummer never wanted to relax and say, 'We've done it now.' He was always trying to get somewhere else; it never seemed to me like he was content.

"I wanted to be a rock star, and that was frowned upon. In the end, I just got fed up. They said, 'Why would you want to leave? We're doing so well!' They were angry at first, and then I was asked back. We're all friends now.

> **"I wanted to be a rock star, and that was frowned upon."** ★

"I briefly went on tour with Black Sabbath in South Africa, and they had a habit of getting a chiropractor to adjust their backs. I tried it, and it made me feel better. As a kid, I was interested in medicine in an obsessive way. Meanwhile, in 15 years doing music, I'd become health-conscious: a non-drinker, -smoker or -drug person. So chiropractic fit the bill perfectly.

"After eight or nine years, I started lecturing to other chiropractors. I now have the largest chiropractic consultancy in Europe. I get chiropractors from all over Europe flying in, and we lecture to them about how to run a company.

"But I still enjoy the hands-on work with patients. If you change someone's life, take them from a situation where there's no hope and get them back to health, that's worth getting out of bed for in the morning. It's bigger than the buzz I got playing for 100,000 people." *AS TOLD TO JON REGARDIE*

* Note: Not all of the "Playlist" songs are legally available for download — yet. In those instances, *Blender* encourages you to purchase the original CD.

Hugh Grannum/DFP (White); Adrian Boot/Urbanimage.tv (the Clash); courtesy of Terry Chimes (Chimes); Celebrity Vibe (Lavigne, 2); Gary French (illustration)

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MOGUL IN TROUBLE

Dash: Facing allegations

UH-OH!

Damon Dash deals with rape allegation, rumored split with Jay-Z

TROUBLE IS BREWING for rap producer/mogul Damon Dash, which may culminate in a rape trial and a split with his Roc-A-Fella business partner Jay-Z.

In January, Kirstie Thompson, a 32-year-old former model, filed a $15 million suit against Dash, claiming he raped her while she was passed out at a 2002 New Year's Eve party in Brazil. Amanda Silverman, a spokeswoman for Dash, vehemently denied the charges, calling them "ludicrous" and "baseless and untrue."

Jay-Z and Dash in happier times

Meanwhile, the long-rumored rift between Dash and Jay-Z may be widening. Sources say Jay-Z has not approved of Roc-A-Fella's move into films or Dash's mentoring of Victoria "Posh Spice" Beckham. More recently, Jay-Z has been in talks with Universal Music's Island Def Jam (the parent of Roc-A-Fella) to create a venture for his own projects. *STEVE KANDELL*

OBITS

ANITA MUI
40, December 30, in Hong Kong, of cervical cancer. Cantonese pop singer and actress who sold millions of albums across Asia. Likened to Madonna for their concurrent careers and her flair for self-reinvention, Mui appeared in several films, including Jackie Chan's *Rumble in the Bronx*.

DAVE DUDLEY
75, December 22, in Danbury, Wisconsin, of an apparent heart attack. Country singer at the forefront of the truck-driving-song craze of the '60s. His hit "Six Days on the Road" is the "Smells Like Teen Spirit" of the genre.

MAX D. BARNES
67, January 11, in Nashville, of complications from pneumonia. Country songwriter who scored hits with George Jones (the enduring Nashville tribute "Who's Gonna Fill Their Shoes"), Conway Twitty, Vince Gill and others.

BOB KEESHAN
76, January 23, in Windsor, Vermont. As Captain Kangaroo, Keeshan hosted his popular children's TV show for more than 30 years, and his multimedia kids'-entertainment empire included the musical recordings *A Day With Captain Kangaroo* and a Christmas album.

Tell Us a Joke!

MARSHALL CRENSHAW

"A horse walks into a bar. The bartender says, 'Why the long face?' A lion walks into a bar and says, 'I'll have a . . . . . beer.' The bartender says, 'Why the long paws?' "

AS TOLD TO DIXIE RECHT

The Long, Slow Death of Elliott Smith

Elliott Smith: His death remains a mystery.

Sad Aftermath

Controversy surrounds Elliott Smith's death after coroner's inconclusive report fails to rule out murder

★ A LOS ANGELES coroner, surprisingly, has concluded that Elliott Smith's death could have been a murder, not a suicide.

L.A. deputy medical examiner Lisa Scheinin's January 6 report stated that one reason for the uncertainty was the absence of "hesitation wounds" on Smith's body. Additionally, no illegal substances were in his system.

After the report was released, Smith's girlfriend, Jennifer Chiba — the only other person present at her home in L.A.'s Echo Park neighborhood when Smith suffered two stab wounds to the chest there last October 21 — said she felt like a suspect. On MTV, she said, "It's absolutely not my fault. I know that, and people close to Elliott know that."

> **After the report, Smith's girlfriend feels like a suspect.**
> ★

This brought a rebuke from Smith's parents, who issued a statement that "neither Elliott's family nor anyone else can claim to know 'the truth' about Elliott's death, and any statement to the contrary mischaracterizes the family's position."

Blender's retrospective ("The Long, Slow Death of Elliott Smith," January), completed weeks before the coroner's report emerged, may offer Chiba supportive evidence not reported elsewhere.

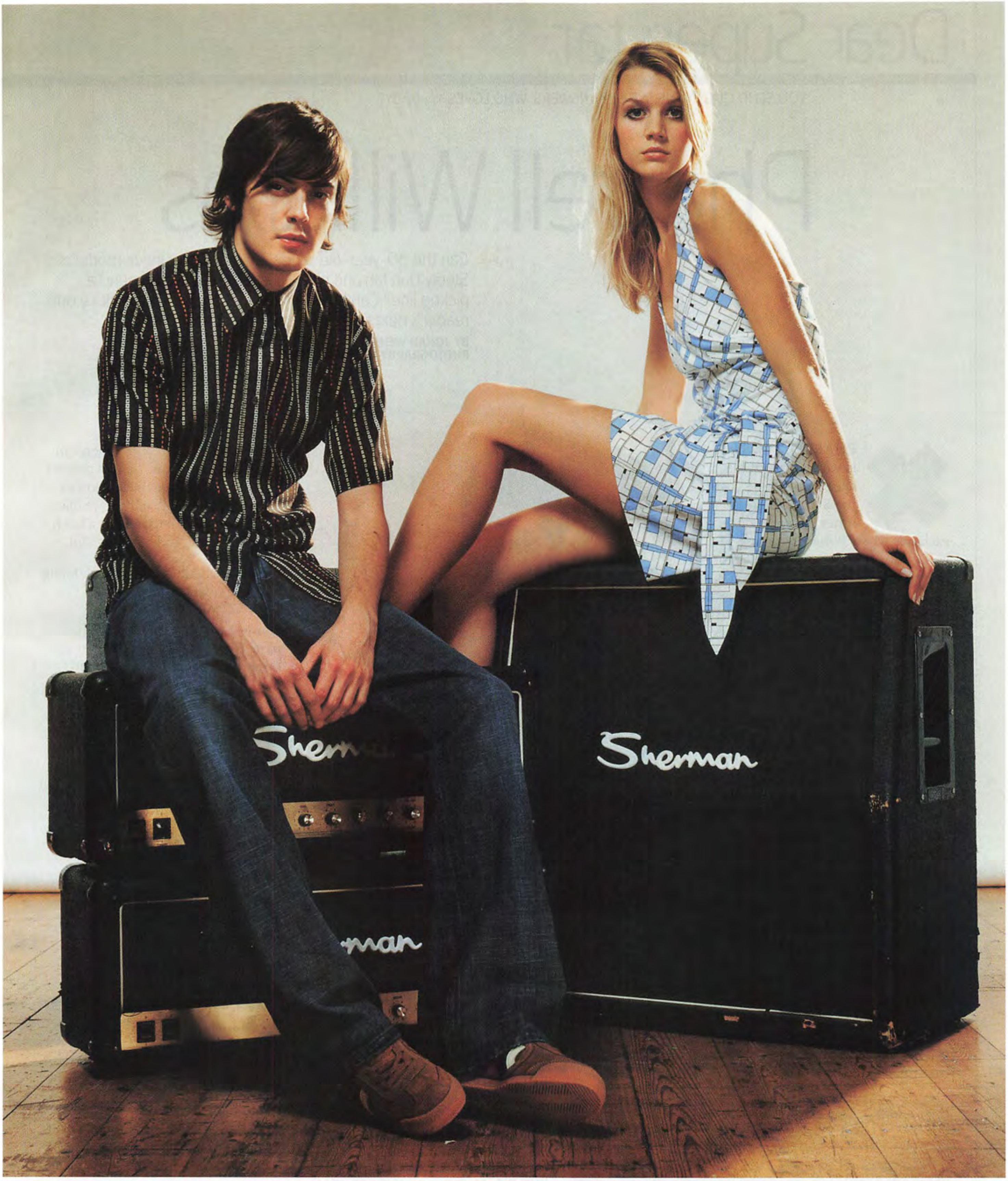
Larry Crane, Smith's coproducer and engineer from Smith's days in Portland, Oregon, told *Blender* that his old friend had spoken of a previous suicide attempt and showed him "a bad scar on his chest."

Blender checked this account with David Smith, the L.A. coroner's office's supervising investigator. He explained that the term *hesitation wounds* includes both fresh cuts and old scars, and he confirmed that Dr. Scheinin had not observed any. Smith's body has been cremated, making further evaluation impossible.

Dr. Scheinin, though, listed other factors "atypical of suicide": stab wounds through Smith's shirt and "possible defensive wounds" on his left hand and right arm.

The LAPD's investigation is continuing. *PHIL SUTCLIFFE*

Tim Soter/Retna Ltd. (Dash); Steve Jennings/Retna Ltd. (Smith); Sarah Cullen (still-life); Johnny Nunez/WireImage.com (Dash and Jay-Z); Gary French (illustration)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Dear Superstar

YOU SEND QUESTIONS, WE GET ANSWERS. WHO LOVES YA, BABY?

Pharrell Williams

Can the 30-year-old producer, musician, singer, modelizer, Steely Dan fan and hitmaking machine recommend a pickup line? Can he tell us a joke? And will he produce one reader's next single? Pharrell, meet your public!

BY JONAH WEINER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARC BAPTISTE

PHARRELL Williams is worried about his sneakers. "These cost me $500!" the Neptunes' superproducer exclaims when *Blender* asks him to strike some skateboarding poses for our photographer.

A skating enthusiast, Williams eventually consents to a few ollies. Not only do his patent-leather Nikes go unharmed, but he lands each trick perfectly. Which makes you wonder: Can the Virginia native do *anything* wrong?

If you turned on your radio for only a half-hour in the last five years, it's a cinch you heard a hit (or four) that Williams helped write. With partner and childhood friend Chad Hugo, he has sat behind the boards for more than 130 tracks, sexing up Britney Spears with "I'm a Slave 4 U," encouraging nudity with Nelly on "Hot in Herre" and bestowing street cred on Justin Timberlake with "Like I Love You."

Then there are his cameos on Jay-Z and Snoop Dogg records; his rap-rock-funk band, N*E*R*D*; his label, Star Trak; and his incredibly hot swimsuit-model girlfriend. "She's just a good friend," he says, grinning coyly. "You can't have too many good friends."

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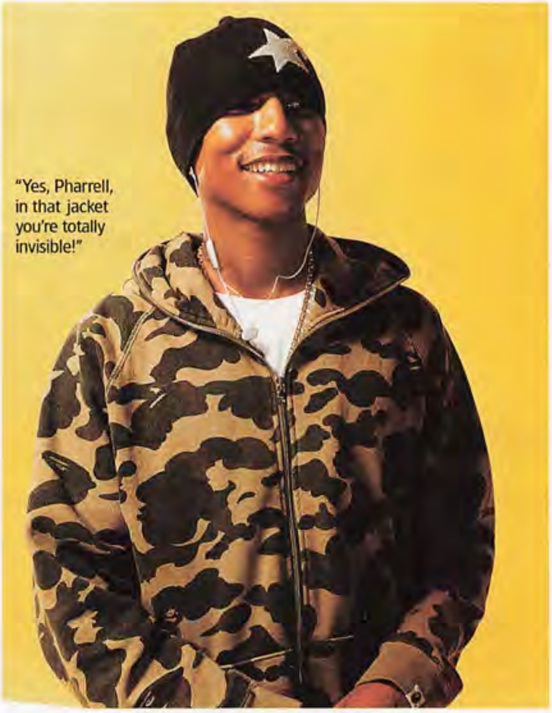

"Yes, Pharrell, in that jacket you're totally invisible!"

I heard you're a fitness fanatic. How do I lose my beer gut?
KOVOLO8, BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA

People look back at the "Beautiful" video, and I had love handles, man. I had to get rid of them shits. So I'm up to 675 sit-ups every morning. Also, cut down on bread: I ain't with that Atkins shit, but you gotta keep your carbs to a biscuit-size bread each meal. But shit, you do 300 sit-ups and take a shower, man, you're going to have an incredible day.

Why did you swear off smoking weed and drinking alcohol?
NAPPEE_HED, GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

I've never smoked weed. I've had weed brownies about four times. One time I had six. I was hallucinating — a fucking mouse was talking to me! I'm just not a drug dude; it's cool for two minutes, and then I'm like, "OK, turn it off." And it doesn't go off! I get a headache as soon as I start drinking. I used to have, like, one Kahlúa and be drunk as a bitch, dancing on the table, talking shit.

What's the hardest thing about dating a supermodel?
YXAXIS777, LINCROFT, NEW JERSEY

Hardest part? There is no hardest part. They're busy, so you never get to see each other, but they're girls just like any other girls. I've let a girl's looks fuck me up only a few times in my life. It got me a little bent out of shape. I don't want to talk about it; it's one of my most vulnerable points.

What's the most expensive thing you've ever gotten for free?
SPAZATAK, PLATTSBURGH, NEW YORK

I'd rather not say, 'cause I think that'd be tacky. But there have been some expensive things and some very nice women. I got a lot of nice friends, man.

Describe the worst haircut you've ever had.
MADMAO, CULVER CITY, CALIFORNIA

When I was 11 and Mr. T was the shit, I got a mohawk. My dad cut it for me. Going to school with that haircut taught me a lot of humility.

I was outraged when Britney Spears said she's "over" the Neptunes. Don't you think *she's* over?
PUR.GOLD, LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY

I appreciate that love and support. I think Britney has her destiny in her own hands. More power to her. I hope she sells even more records than she sold with us. I didn't pay attention to her wedding or her kiss with Madonna. I've seen girls kiss each other all the time. →

BLENDER
DEAR SUPERSTAR
PHARRELL WILLIAMS
JANUARY 22, 2004

> ["The hardest part of dating a supermodel? There is no hardest part."]

JEANS BY **LEVI'S**;
DECK BY **ZOO YORK**

"Wheeeeeeee!"

What's the one song you produced that you thought was going to be huge, but it flopped?
L_FARRAGUT, TAMPA, FLORIDA

There was a record that I did with 702 [an R&B girl group] called "I Still Love You," which was early last year. And also a record I did with Papa Roach. I thought that was going to be huge. I don't blame myself or the artist. I blame the labels. They just didn't know what the fuck they were doing.

Michael Jackson: innocent or guilty?
HENLEY8, CLEVELAND

I don't know, man. I don't get involved in shit like that.

> "The figure tossed around, $150,000 — that's cheap."
> ON HIS PRODUCING FEE
> ★

What's the nerdiest thing you did when you were a kid?
FREEKYP8003, ATLANTA

I would put Cheerios in my ice cream. At school, I used to do the Robot down the hall every day. I wasn't a nerd, just . . . different.

Why won't Jay-Z and Beyoncé just admit they're dating, already?
TAMMIBEE, MARIN CITY, CALIFORNIA

It's incredible that my man found the right girlfriend and that my homegirl found the right dude. Sometimes the relationship is far more important than getting the world involved — it could be potentially disastrous. When you're ready to tell everybody, then you tell everybody. Love is sacred.

***Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* or *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock*?**
BULLETTYME9, BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

See, I never really got into the show or the movies. I just really liked what *Star Trek* stood for. If you turn the NASA symbol straight up, there's the *Star Trek* symbol on the inside. What else could that mean? Think about it: We're building a space station, talking about colonizing Mars, and NASA has made every gadget except the transportation device. I didn't see all this as a kid, but now I'm just like, "Whoa."

What's your favorite Steely Dan lyric?
TGCAMPBELL, RENO, NEVADA

"When the demon is at your door/In the morning it won't be there/No *mooooore*. . . ." It's just crazy. "Any Major Dude" is a dope song. The chord changes fuck you up, and then you go back and listen to Donald Fagen sing.

"I pity the fool with a haircut like mine."

With supermodels at a Victoria's Secret party, November 2003

What's something that you're absolutely no good at?
KJFRESH, LINCOLN, NEBRASKA

Basketball. I learned how to shoot a mean free throw, but my game sucks. I challenge myself: If there's something I'm not good at, I'm gonna work at it.

Pharrell is a member of the terrifying Vulcan gang!

How many zeros are there in the dollar amount that you made off Nelly's "Hot in Herre"?
ALEC_GRAND21, BALTIMORE

There are a lot, but I never disclose shit like that.

What's the craziest thing you ever saw Ol' Dirty Bastard do when you guys were in the studio together?
TRIPLEICE, BAYONNE, NEW JERSEY

He came in wearing two pairs of sunglasses. One over the other. Kept them on the whole time, did his verses, everything. I wasn't gonna be the one to ask him why!

You're a smooth operator. Please give me a fail-safe pickup line.
HUFFAFC, COLUMBUS, OHIO

Cheerios. Not dog biscuits.

"Oh, you modelin', Ma? Wanna let your hair down? Are you ready to move? Wanna sit in my coupe? Wanna keep on dancing? You wanna run in my mansion?" I wrote that for Jadakiss's "Knock Yourself Out." I wrote it from experience. I would never say that, but I've watched niggas kick shit like that.

Who's the hottest new hip-hop artist out now, in your opinion?
CHANCEOD, EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

Kanye West. He's unafraid to be himself. He's one of us. We don't give a fuck. If you mean what you do and say, and you put it in your music, that's all the glory. →

Marc Baptiste (Williams, top); Sipa Press (Mr. T); Dimitrios Kambouris/WireImage.com (with models); Alphonse Telymonde (still-life); Frank Mullen/WireImage.com (Williams, bottom)

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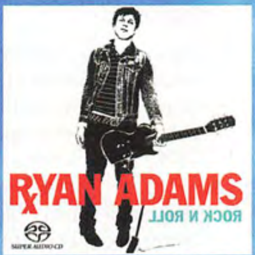

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What's the biggest combo you've ever landed on a skateboard?

YEAH99YEH, AUSTIN, TEXAS

Back in my heyday, I could do a "double-fisted." Also called a "ho-ho." That's when you do a hand plant and put your other hand down and leave the skateboard on your feet. I started skating when I was 10 and stopped when I was, like, 16. I started again recently, but I don't get much time to practice.

Who are you supporting in the presidential election?

SARAHTF, MANCHESTER, NEW HAMPSHIRE

I don't know. You saw what Bush pulled off four years ago! He lost, called his brother and said, "Hey, switch some shit up." I heard some story, like they made a lot of black votes not count in certain places. I don't pay attention to that world, 'cause it's so corrupt. But I do urge people to vote, because good energy will help you prevail in sketchy situations.

Age 19, with his gold record for producing Wreckx-N-Effect's "Rump Shaker," 1992

↑ Pharrell joins Snoop Dogg in Rio de Janeiro for the "Beautiful" video.

I want to record a song I wrote, and I want you to produce it. How much do I have to save?

CHUCK_DC, BOSTON

I don't answer those questions. Kids read these interviews, and I can't let them think that it's all about the money. But the little fucking figure people toss around, $150,000 — that's actually cheap.

Whose album did you like better: Clay Aiken's or Ruben Studdard's?

POPPY_Q_JONES, NEW YORK, NEW YORK

I think Clay can sing. I think Ruben has a long career ahead of him if he just blueprints it right. I didn't really follow *American Idol*, but I saw an episode of all the people who lost early on, and that's the funniest shit ever, ever, ever. This one dude just could not dance, and nigga just said 'Fuck it' and went crazy, dancing hard and fast as hell.

How many trucker caps do you own, and can I have one?

BIZZY2ME, COOPERSVILLE, MICHIGAN

I gave 'em all away. I can't even estimate how many I had. I was getting them mailed to me all the time. I still wear some camouflage joints to hide my face. I don't like getting on TV and showing my face no more. I did a lot of interviews in Europe behind a bandanna. But I can definitely give you a hat, dude. I'll sign it and send it.

Paris Hilton has said that she wants to be a singer — would you produce a song for her?

LOTHONGHOTTIE, BELFAST, MAINE

Nah, I'm just working on N*E*R*D* this year. But you know, a lot of people talk shit — I think Paris is cute. She pulls off that old-money

Courtesy of the Williams family (Williams with gold record)

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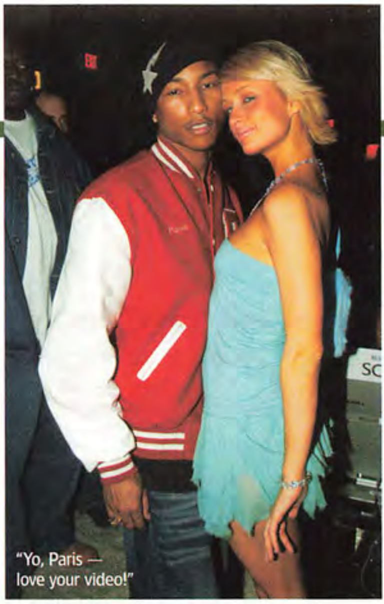


"Yo, Paris — love your video!"

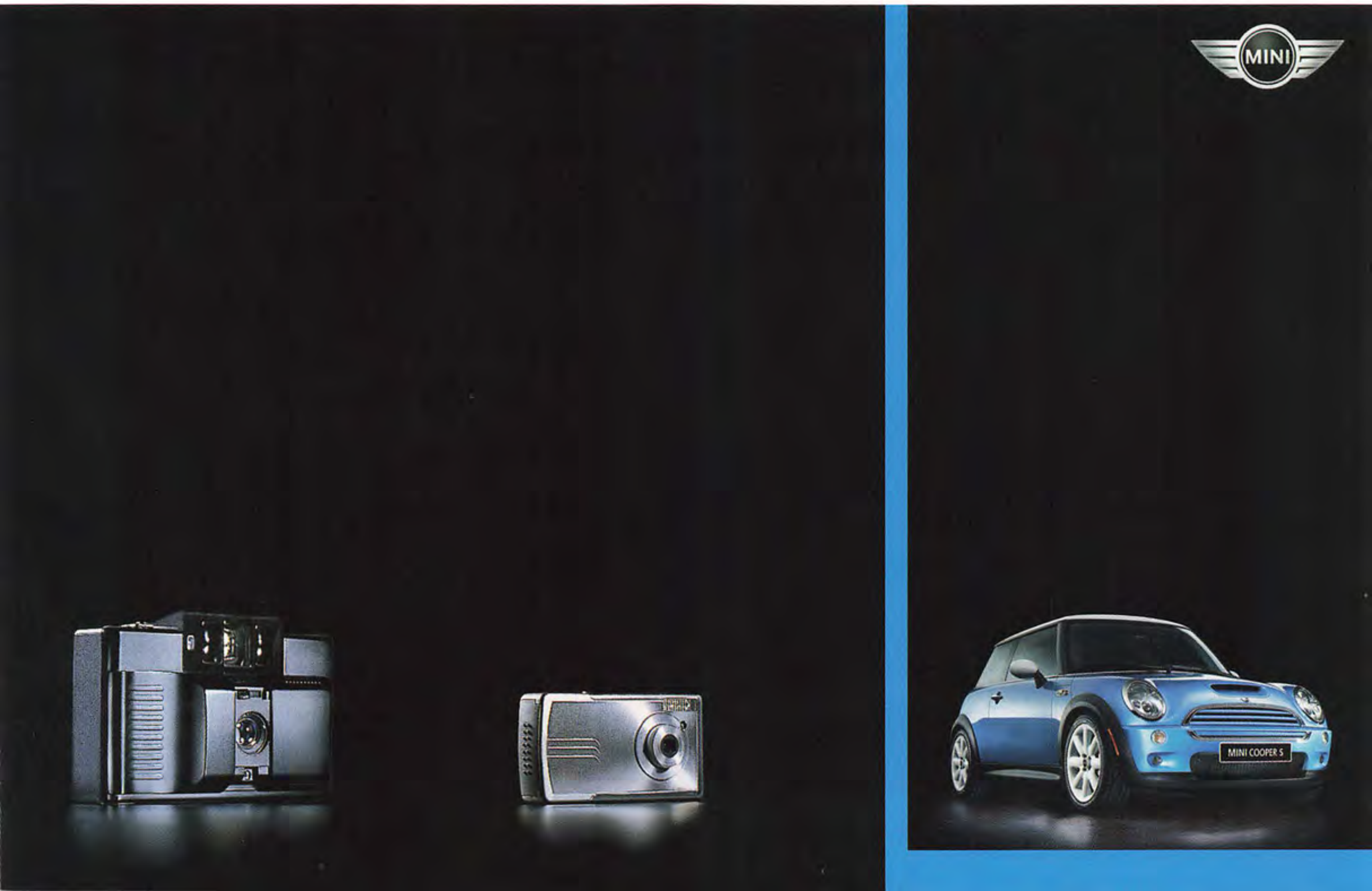
From left: Dimitrios Kambouris/WireImage.com; Patrick Hoelck/Celebrity Photo

look! She's like, "I have paper. You're poor, you're a peasant, you need to get away from me. Don't touch me — are you talking to me? My name is Paris. My last name, you slept there before. Get outta here." She's attractive.

What's your favorite joke?
MAG-RUSS, HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA

"She saw me. She buzzed around me. She looked at me. She sat on me. She bit me. She sucked me. She swallowed. And then she just got up and left. Fucking mosquito." That's a good one, right? [BLENDER]

N*E*R*D*, from left: Shay Haley, Williams, Chad Hugo



Young Americans

In 1974, **David Bowie** checked into a Philly studio with no lyrics, a backup singer/mistress who couldn't sing and a big pile of coke. A few days later, he had created a soulful epic that would bewilder his glam-rock fan base

29 YEARS AGO April 1975 THIS MONTH

"'YOUNG Americans' wouldn't have happened without David Bowie's cocaine addiction," Duran Duran's John Taylor asserted in a recent interview.

Bowie himself has claimed that he can't remember most of 1974, when he recorded the song. "[The year is] none too clear. . . . A lot of it is really blurry," he said. There's no reason to disbelieve him, but maybe he simply prefers not to say too much about those days.

Who could blame him? After all, when he checked into the Hotel Barclay in Philadelphia on August 11, 1974, his marriage to Angie Bowie was on the rocks, his financial affairs were in chaos, he looked like a ghost and he was seriously underweight, largely because of his escalating cocaine habit.

In fact, about the only thing Bowie had in his favor was that just down the street, at Sigma Sound Studios, was a band of remarkably gifted young musicians waiting to help him record his next album.

Among them was guitarist Carlos Alomar, who had met Bowie earlier that year in New York. "I met him at RCA, when he was producing some tracks for [Scottish pop singer] Lulu. He was so thin, about 100 pounds, and one of the first things I said to him was, 'Man, you look like shit. You've gotta come to my house and eat some decent food.' And he did."

Alomar was instrumental in fanning the flames of Bowie's interest in black music, taking him regularly to Harlem's legendary Apollo Theater to see the greatest soul and funk acts of the time.

Ever the chameleon, Bowie was leaving his glittery Ziggy Stardust persona in the past. Now keen on incorporating elements of funk and Latin music in his own songs, he decided to record at Sigma because it was the home of the Philly Soul sound, producing hits for the O'Jays, the Delfonics and others.

Alomar was the first to hear the fruits of his new direction. "It started off just as little fragments, ideas and riffs that he'd bang out on the piano or on his acoustic guitar," Alomar recalls. "I would work with those ideas, supplying him with signature guitar lines so he could choose — one from column A, one from column B and so on."

The first track that started to come together was something Bowie initially called "The Young American." "It was only about four hours into the first session," Alomar says. "We got to the guitar breakdown, and we knew we had something." Bowie returned to his hotel room and began fleshing out his sketchy lyric ideas.

When everyone returned to the studio the next day, Alomar's wife, Robin Clark, and his best friend, the virtually unknown Luther Vandross, had come in to help on backing vocals alongside Bowie's mistress, Ava Cherry. "Robin and Luther really thought Ava couldn't sing. Her lack of technique caused problems," Alomar remembers.

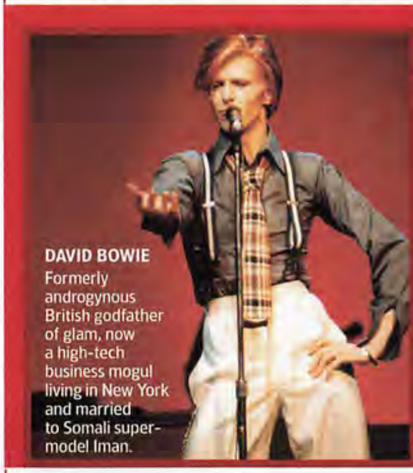
Bowie tended to start recording late at night and work until dawn. "He used drugs to keep himself awake," Alomar explains. "I didn't get the impression that he was addicted — it was more a functional thing, so he'd be 'on' whenever the moment came to record."

Another sessioneer at the time was saxophonist David Sanborn. "Several of us were pretty stoned during those sessions," he recalls, "but whatever problems David was having with drugs, they didn't affect his control of the session."

On the third day, producer Tony Visconti arrived from England to take over from house engineer Carl Parullo, because Bowie wasn't happy with the sound he had been getting so far. "I could hear the problem," Visconti says. "In those days, in America, engineers recorded 'dry' and 'flat,' waiting for the mix to add the equalization, reverbs and special effects. But the British often recorded with the special effects right on the session. I was British-trained, and David was used to this sound. So I rolled up my sleeves and got right into it."

VITAL STATISTICS

SONG	"Young Americans"
ARTIST	David Bowie
LABEL	RCA
PERFORMERS	David Bowie *vocals* Carlos Alomar *guitar* David Sanborn *saxophone* Mike Garson *piano* Willie Weeks *bass* Andy Newmark *drums* Luther Vandross, Ava Cherry, Robin Clark *backing vocals*
PRODUCER	Tony Visconti
RELEASED	February 21, 1975
HIGHEST CHART POSITION	28
WEEKS ON CHART	11



DAVID BOWIE
Formerly androgynous British godfather of glam, now a high-tech business mogul living in New York and married to Somali supermodel Iman.

WHO'S WHO

TONY VISCONTI
New York–born, British-trained producer. Closely identified with glam because of his productions for Bowie and T. Rex, but has also worked with the Moody Blues, U2 and Thin Lizzy.

CARLOS ALOMAR
Puerto Rican guitarist who started performing in the Apollo Theater's house band at 16. He has recorded with John Lennon, Paul McCartney and Iggy Pop. Currently A&R director for Boombacker Music.

DAVID SANBORN
Grammy-winning saxophonist who took up the instrument as therapy for childhood polio. Has performed with Stevie Wonder, Bruce Springsteen, the Rolling Stones, the Eagles and Paul Simon.

Steve Morley/Redferns/Retna Ltd (Bowie); Jacques Lowe/Retna Ltd (Sanborn)

That same day, Bowie overheard Vandross and Clark improvising some vocals based around the words *young Americans,* and was sufficiently impressed to immediately incorporate them into the backing track. "We had a bit of a drum problem," Alomar points out. "If you listen to it, you'll hear that the drums feel slow in the middle of the track, so David got me to keep playing the guitar breakdown until the drums got back in time."

The track was completed to Bowie's satisfaction in the early hours of the next morning. Then came Sanborn's turn. "He didn't have a vocal melody or a complete lyric at that point," Sanborn recalls. "It was pretty much rhythm guitar, bass and drums, but Bowie didn't try to direct me. I was free to just respond to whatever the backing track inspired in me. They were very loose sessions, with Bowie usually up in the control booth directing us rather than playing."

David Bowie

Bowie's lyrics, when completed, exposed the despair and emptiness of American society in the wake of President Nixon's resignation. Sanborn says he was surprised when he heard the final version, including Bowie's vocals. "Those sessions had been so loose," he says, "that I was shocked by how coherent it all seemed when I heard the finished track."

Although Bowie has referred to his "Young Americans" period as "plastic soul," and many of his old fans were disappointed in the dramatic change in style, the track put him back in the *Billboard* Top 40 for the first time in two years.

U2 and the Cure are among the bands who have covered the song. "The Cure don't often do cover versions," lead singer Robert Smith has said, "but we did 'Young Americans' because David Bowie has written some great songs, and that's one of my favorites." A version of the tune graced the soundtrack of the 1999 movie *Drop Dead Gorgeous,* and "Young Americans" also gave its title to a 1993 Harvey Keitel movie and a more recent TV series. Not bad for plastic soul. JOHNNY BLACK

David Bowie pledges allegiance to the flag, glass of milk.

Alphonse Telymonde (still-life); Michael Ochs Archives.com (Bowie)

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Ask Blender

SOLVING YOUR POP CONUNDRUMS SINCE 2001

Manowar: "And here's another really loud one!"

Do the Who still hold the record for the loudest concert ever?

CRAIG CASE, BALTIMORE

Not anymore. The British rock legends used to hold the title for the loudest performance — their gig at Charlton Athletic Football Ground in London on May 31, 1976, measured a then-record-breaking 120 decibels (Pete Townshend blames his hearing problems on his band's onstage volume).

The Who's crown was stolen, however, by Rochester, New York's leading loincloth-wearing metal warlords, Manowar, whose March 1994 performance in Hanover, Germany, measured 129.5 decibels (a commercial jet during takeoff logs in at 150 decibels). Manowar's amplifiers and speakers weighed 10 tons. "The whole purpose of playing live is to blow people's heads off," said bassist Joey DeMaio.

Was the female singer in the Black Eyed Peas on the '80s TV show *Kids Incorporated*?

VALERIE STINSON, NUTLEY, NEW JERSEY

Yes, the singer known as Fergie might look pretty hip these days, but in the '80s she was Stacy Ferguson, part of the original lineup on the odd Nickelodeon show on which children would sing and dance to the latest pop hits. After leaving *Kids Incorporated* in 1989, she went on to form the mid-'90s dance-pop act Wild Orchid with two others from the program.

The Black Eyed Peas' Fergie

Kids Incorporated ran until 1993; its cast also included Jennifer Love Hewitt and actor Eric Balfour (who later became dangerous-but-sensitive Gabe on *Six Feet Under*). Less commendably, the series also gave David Hasselhoff his first singing break. Points are deducted, too, for the episode in which the kids sing Billy Idol's anthem to masturbation, "Dancing With Myself." It's just too weird.

YOUR QUESTIONS>>

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Please include your first and last name, your hometown and your state or province. Cool!

I heard there was a weird connection between John Lennon and the lead singer of the Germs. What was it?

ZACK ST. JOHN, VIA E-MAIL

The pair never met, but they do have a grisly connection. Paul Breahm, the charismatic frontman for late-'70s Los Angeles punk legends the Germs, was known as Darby Crash. Onstage, this self-styled "American Sid Vicious" would frequently cut himself, strip and smear peanut butter over his body. The Germs' 1979 debut, *(GI)*, produced by Joan Jett, helped define the Los Angeles punk scene. The band's lineup also featured Pat Smear, future touring guitarist for Nirvana (the Germs were a Kurt Cobain favorite), and Belinda Carlisle was their first drummer.

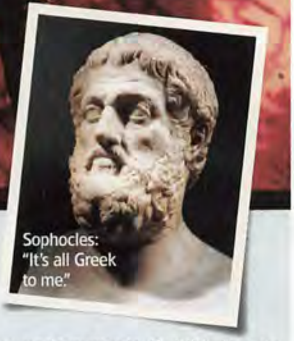
By 1980, Crash, having broken up the band, wasn't doing well. During a trip to England, he became fixated on Adam and the Ants. Returning to L.A. in pirate gear, makeup and feathers, he was ridiculed by his former fans, which contributed to his already strong suicidal tendencies.

The Germs' Darby Crash and John Lennon (inset), circa 1980

On December 7, 1980, a few days after the Germs reunited for a onetime gig, the 21-year-old decided to make good on what he had threatened to do many times before. He and a friend bought $400 worth of heroin and made a double-suicide pact. Crash scribbled a note reading "My life, my leather, my love goes to Bosco" (referring to a former bandmate), then injected the girl and himself. However, only Crash's dose proved to be fatal.

Crash's intended punk-martyr status failed to materialize, though: Media attention swiftly shifted a few hours later when Mark David Chapman shot John Lennon dead in Manhattan. [BLENDER]

Jim Morrison spends another wild night hanging paintings.



Sophocles: "It's all Greek to me."

What possessed the Doors' Jim Morrison, in "The End," to say he wanted to fuck his mother?

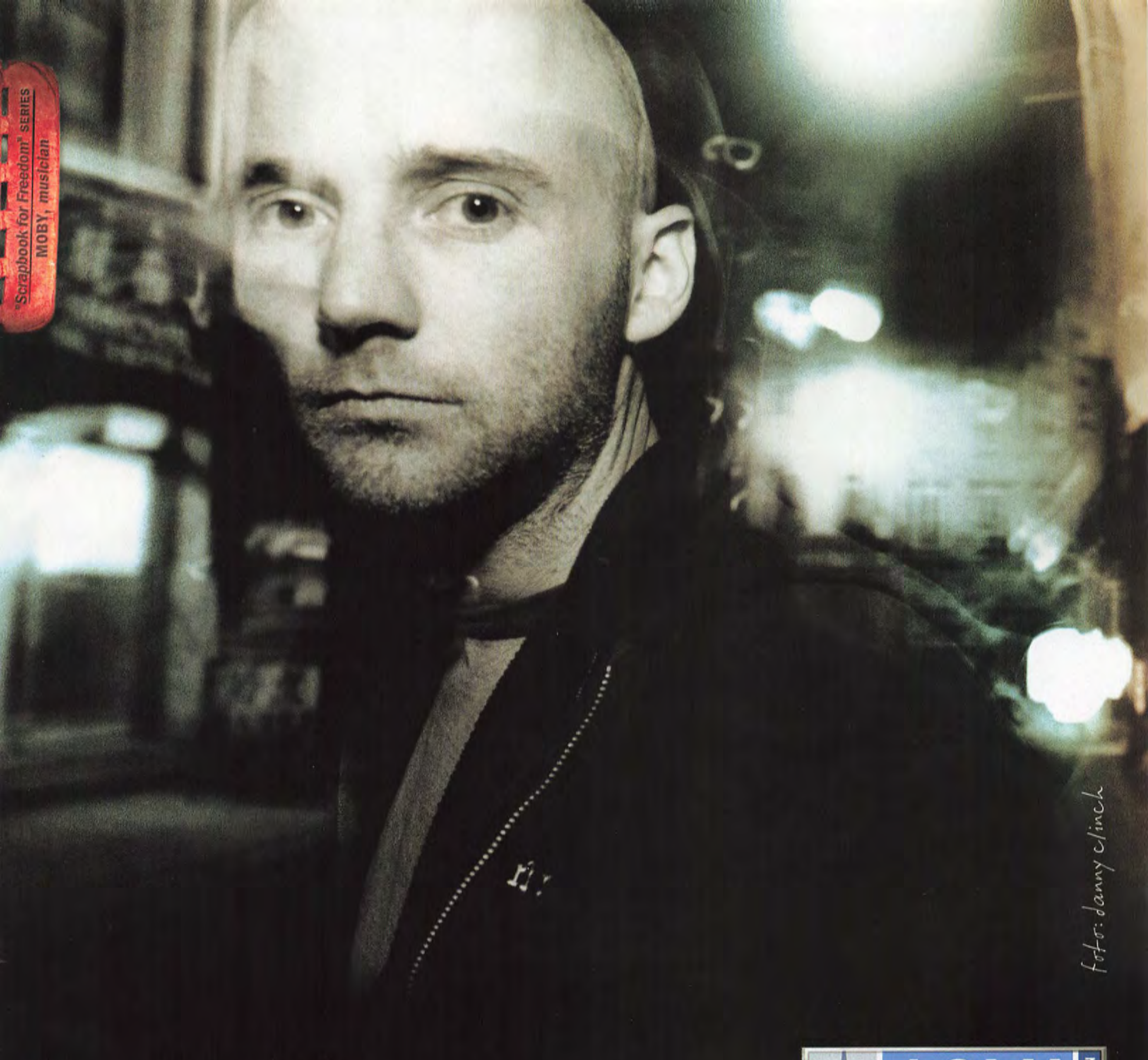
SCOTT SCHILLING, BOULDER, COLORADO

>> In short: acid. The epic finale to the Doors' 1967 self-titled debut album was one of their earliest songs, and onstage, through the improvised middle section, Morrison would intone random poetic fragments. During one LSD-heavy performance at L.A.'s famed Whisky A Go-Go, he went further than usual, bellowing the now-famous lines, "Father! 'Yes, son?' I want to kill you. Mother, I want to fuck you!"

Morrison was in a production of Sophocles's ancient Greek tragedy *Oedipus Rex* (whose titular hero kills his father and marries his mother) at Florida State University, and was enthralled by its Freudian undercurrents. But this literary reference wasn't immediately apparent to the Whisky's hard-bitten manager, Phil Tanzini, who, according to reports, was leaping around shouting, "He can't say that! The goddammed motherfucker can't say that! It's obscene!"

When Tanzini furiously confronted the band backstage, keyboardist Ray Manzarek tried to placate him with an explanation of the reference. This went over rather poorly, with Tanzini reportedly responding, "Greek? I'll give you Greek in your fucking asshole, you jack-off!" He then banned the Doors from playing the prestigious venue.

Tony Mottram/Retna Ltd. (Manowar); Time Life Pictures/Getty Images (Morrison); Archivo Iconografico, S.A/Corbis (Sophocles); Bob Gruen/Starfile (Lennon); Michael Ochs Archives.com (Crash); Foto Fantasies (Kids Incorporated)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Survivor!

Last October, **Evanescence** lead guitarist Ben Moody unexpectedly left the group he cofounded just as it was becoming one of the biggest bands in the world. In her first interview since his departure, singer Amy Lee tells *Blender:* "I'm ready to face *anything* now."

BY MICHAEL ODELL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JUSTIN STEPHENS

BECAUSE AMY LEE won't heed municipal warning signage, it seems we are going to be pecked to death.

Blender and the petite, raven-haired Evanescence lead singer are sitting in the lovely City Botanic Gardens in Brisbane, Australia. It's summer in the Queensland capital, and it's also the day of Evanescence's debut Australian show. We have strolled to the Gardens Café to talk. *Blender* had spotted it earlier in the day and felt that its collection of macabre banyan trees, plus the eerie squawking and cackling in the undergrowth, would provide an appropriately gothic setting for our meeting.

Signs, however, clearly forbid the feeding of birds.

"But holding out a hand with a piece of food in it isn't strictly feeding, is it?" Lee reasons, waving her muffin.

Within seconds, our interview is an avian battle zone as parrots, pigeons and specimens of the mighty ibis swarm for a bite of her blueberry-flavored lunchtime snack. It's clear these animals have read the script to Hitchcock's *The Birds* and waste no time re-creating the *arrck! arrck!* and associated flapping and pecking of the classic film.

Blender is not ashamed to say that we find the situation quite scary. But not Lee. She is watery-eyed with pleasure.

"See that? They fed off my hands!" she exclaims as *Blender* wards the last of the marauding little bastards off the table.

"Having animals feeding off me moves me to tears," Lee says, "if that's not being a little . . . dark."

* * * * *

BEING A LITTLE dark, it turns out, is kind of her job. Just a year ago, the 22-year-old Lee and her co-songwriter and lead guitarist, Ben Moody, had finished recording Evanescence's debut album, *Fallen*, in Los Angeles. The Little Rock, Arkansas, natives were playing gigs to crowds of 200. Since then, Lee's skyscraping voice and macabre lyrical world — crystallized in the single "Bring Me to Life" — and Moody's goth-metal stylings have pushed *Fallen* to 3 million-plus sales and made Lee one of the biggest female rock stars in the world.

But there has also been considerable intrigue and controversy. Evanescence are former stalwarts of the Christian-music circuit, but *Fallen* was removed from Christian record stores when the band told *Entertainment Weekly* last April that the album wasn't aimed at the faithful. Lee says she has never been formally religious. Moody, though, had publicly declared his strong beliefs.

"I have to blame that on Ben," Lee says now. "Even back when we were 15, he was saying, 'Jesus saved my soul,' and I knew it would bring trouble."

Then there was Lee and Moody's relationship. *Fallen*'s sleeve dedications (She: "Thanks for bringing me to life"; He: "You will always have all of me") suggested they had been lovers, but with success came rumors that Moody was unhappy with Lee's growing profile and domineering approach.

Then, in October, while on tour in Europe, Moody left the group before a scheduled show. He has not spoken to his former bandmates since. Evanescence have continued without a pause, but with little explanation. There have even been rumors that Moody will return.

Savaged by birds or not, it's clear Lee is here to set the record straight.

"You know what I did this morning?" she begins. "I was writing a check as part of Ben's settlement for quitting the band. He's gone for good. We can all breathe again."

She smiles.

"Ben leaving was a very good moment. We got to the point where the band was really unhealthy. I can't explain, because I don't yet totally understand it myself, but Ben and I pretended that we were friends when really we were business partners. We didn't talk. We never stayed on the same bus. We weren't friends. We were friends when we met and I was 13 years old, but . . . you don't expect that to survive until you're 22." (Moody declined to comment.)

"Ben's gone for good. We can breathe again." **AMY LEE**

On the night of Moody's departure, Evanescence were in Stockholm, and Lee was suffering from viral bronchitis. Moody called the band's management in the U.S. and said he was quitting. Again, via management, Lee asked him to stay until the end of the tour. Otherwise, everything they had worked for — the tour, the band — would collapse.

But by the next morning, Moody was on a plane home.

At 8 A.M. the day after that, Lee called a band meeting. With steely resolve, she said she planned to improvise — guitarist John LeCompt would now play lead. She wouldn't cancel a single show.

"Ben knew I was ill," she says. "He knew what he was doing. That made me angry. I wanted to prove we could come through the challenge."

And they did. Then, afterward, they threw a party.

"We're all incredibly grateful that Ben isn't with us anymore, Ben included," Lee says. "As far as I know, he's back in Little Rock now, doing what he wants. Working out of his home."

In fact, reports suggest that he has joined forces with Avril Lavigne for her next record. Lee says rumors that he was unhappy with her stardom and willfulness are untrue.

"It's a lot more than that," she says. "Ben had issues that had nothing to do with the band. I don't understand Ben. I never really have. I thought I did when we were kids, but that changed. He's very difficult to figure out. One day he's one person, the next he's someone else."

You formed this band with Ben when you were 13. And yet you didn't want to call him the night he left?

"To be very honest, it would have been weird for me to call him. I don't want him to read this and hate me forever, so I'm not going to say why I never went to see him."

* * * * *

YOU DON'T NEED to watch the lead singer giggle as she's being eaten by birds to realize that Evanescence are a little bit weird.

It began with the intense teenage bond of Lee and Moody, two introverts who met in 1995 at summer camp in Arkansas. She was 13, he 14. Lee had studied piano since fourth grade and represented Arkansas in its state choir. Moody was a budding guitarist. They began writing songs together.

They played occasional gigs in Little Rock with guesting musicians, but they kept their music mostly to themselves. By the time Lee was 19, they had made a demo that was overheard by an engineer while being mixed in a Memphis studio. The tape went to New York, and the band was signed by Wind-Up Records, the home of Creed.

Wind-Up unveiled an unorthodox plan for its charges: old-school artist →

Styling: Andrea Duff/The Namos Agency; hair and makeup: Beth Wilson

INTRABAND DISCORD!

Exit, Stage Right

Just because your main songwriter quits doesn't mean your band is doomed, does it? Ask these guys!

Limpbizkit with Wes Borland (far right)

LIMPBIZKIT

THEY ARE Rap-rock overlords who became the public face of nü-metal.

WHO JUMPED SHIP? Guitarist Wes Borland, who gave the band some much-needed style and humor.

THE AFTERMATH Their new album is entitled *Results May Vary*. They don't — it's a uniformly charmless fiasco from start to finish.

👎

PINK FLOYD

THEY ARE Intellectual prog-rockers whose *Piper at the Gates of Dawn*, from 1967, is the greatest psychedelic pop record that isn't *Sgt. Pepper's*.

WHO JUMPED SHIP? Frontman Syd Barrett, who was hospitalized for being nuts in 1968.

THE AFTERMATH Released *Dark Side of the Moon* in 1973 — it remained on the *Billboard* Top 200 for 741 weeks — and, later, *The Wall* (1979), which topped the charts for 15 weeks.

👍

DEPECHE MODE

THEY ARE Synth-rock mainstays whose 1981 debut album, *Speak and Spell*, is lightweight dance-pop heaven.

WHO JUMPED SHIP? The group's main songwriter, Vince Clarke, who would resurface in Yazoo and, later, Erasure.

THE AFTERMATH Martin Gore started writing the songs, and the Mode went goth. Strangely, their popularity exploded, and soon they were selling out Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles.

👍

JOY DIVISION

THEY ARE Post-punk miserablists who created the landmarks of despair *Unknown Pleasures* (1979) and *Closer* (1980). They also made raincoats fashionable.

WHO JUMPED SHIP? Singer Ian Curtis hanged himself two days before the band's first American tour in 1980.

THE AFTERMATH Renamed themselves New Order. Their lighter but still moody pop brought them worldwide success. BEN MITCHELL

👍

Pink Floyd with Syd Barrett (center)

development. Lee was 19 when she, Moody and keyboard player David Hodges were sent to live in Los Angeles, in an apartment in the Studio City neighborhood. They received $25 a day for expenses. Lee did the washing and cooking.

"I felt like an angry housewife sometimes," she says, laughing.

But she got a room to herself; Moody and Hodges had to share one. To combat her chronic shyness, she was sent to acting classes. Lee's increasingly dark writings belied that shyness, though, and she had to attempt to find a way to communicate with an audience.

Fallen is no easy listen — the gothic lyrics wrestle with themes of death and suffocation, crushed spirits and the search for redemption. Teenagers have identified and responded to Lee's purple melodrama the way they do to Anne Rice's haunted novels. When her mother heard the songs, she asked Amy if she wanted to see a therapist.

Lee has been mostly evasive about where her angst springs from. In the '80s, her parents, John and Sara, moved around among several states. While still in their twenties, they started a family. First came Amy, and then, three years later, a little sister. Amy adored her. In 1987, when Amy was 6, her sister contracted an unidentified illness and died at age 3. Even now, Lee says, doctors have been unable to explain exactly what occurred.

"When that happened, my whole perception of life changed," Lee says. "It sounds stupid, but that was when I became an artist. The music is my attempt to heal myself. Things like that can destroy you, or you can get through it."

> "Howard Stern's show is just negative shit."
> AMY LEE

Lee's gray-blue eyes fill with tears. Her voice wobbles. The kids at the next table stop slurping their drinks. She says she won't reveal her sister's name, because it would be too weird to see it in print. It would upset her mother, she says, and — you never know — fans might try to find her grave. But listen to the song "Hello" on *Fallen*, and you feel the grief.

"My sister's death taught me how short life can be, and it has driven me to achieve things," Lee says. "I have a list of 50 things I want to achieve. Not necessarily in entertainment, just personal goals. Life's fragility drives me on."

It is this drive that forms the paradox at the heart of Evanescence. Where Lee's lyrics are forlorn and stricken, she is remarkably dynamic, energetic and precociously self-possessed for a woman who is only 22 years old.

"I wanted to be an artist, but it turns out I have to be director and owner of Evanescence LLC too," she says. "I can handle it."

Thus far, she's handled it well, by most accounts. But there have been some bumps along the way.

For example, there was the now-infamous dress she wore at a September 2003 show in New York, which she designed and embroidered with self-hating words like BITCH, NOTHING and USELESS. At the time, she said that the dress was a riposte to an ugly, abusive comment from a New York DJ who introduced the band to the crowd at the city's Webster Hall that past April. He said he had been jerking off to the picture of Lee's face on the cover of *Fallen*. She was so disgusted, she says, she designed the dress and wore it at the band's next show at the venue.

"I said it was a comment on tainted innocence," she recalls.

But it wasn't at all, it turns out. It was her statement against a boyfriend who physically and verbally abused her during a three-year relationship that ended relatively recently.

"Most of *Fallen* is inspired by that relationship," she says, declining to identify the ex. "I never want to say his name or see him again. It was verbal and physical abuse. But like a lot of women in that situation, I spent my time protecting him and persuading people that everything was OK."

So why did you say that the dress was a response to what the DJ had said?

"The next time we played Webster Hall, it was Fashion Week in New York, so I knew I could use it and get some press for it," she says with a shrug.

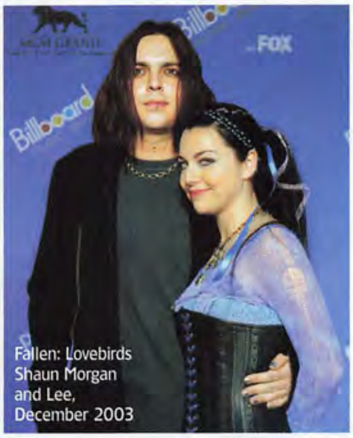
She has changed, she says. She's become tougher. If a boyfriend hit her now, she'd leave. If the DJ repeated his stupidity, she'd scream, "Fuck you!"

Lee now clearly aligns herself with riskier performers, such as her "idol" Björk, more than with pop's current sensationalists. "I don't see that you can even put an artist like Björk and someone like Christina Aguilera in the same category," she says. "I mean, is it possible to strip and not be compromised as an artist? As a woman? Everything you say is upstaged by the fact that everyone is checking out your ass."

From top: David Titlow/Camera Press/Retna; Deco Hoffmann/Rex USA

↑ Evanescence, from left: Terry Balsamo, Rocky Gray, John LeCompt, Will Boyd, Amy Lee

Lee and Ben Moody pretend to like each other in Australia, July 2003



Fallen: Lovebirds Shaun Morgan and Lee, December 2003

Clockwise from top left: Justin Stephens; Bob King/APL/WireImage.com; Hubert Boesl/dpa/Landov; Rahav Segev/ZUMA Press

Lee has heard that Howard Stern recently said she needs to lose 50 pounds.

"His show is just negative shit," she replies.

* * * * *

BUT THINGS ARE changing for Amy Lee. *Fallen* is becoming a hard album to tour behind, she says, because the lyrics relate to the abused, depressed person she used to be.

Two nights ago, she finished a new song during sound check in Auckland, New Zealand. The track is tentatively called "The Last Song I'm Wasting on You." She utters a giggly laugh. She won't say who it's about.

Fans can expect a brighter outlook in other new songs, though. Since last June, Lee has been dating Shaun Morgan, lead singer for the South African hard-rock band Seether (also signed to Wind-Up). She was unsure at first whether another rock star, especially one from a band called Seether, was the best choice after an abusive relationship. "I went through a time hating men and being a feminist, but that's not me," she says.

For Lee's birthday, Morgan gave her a silver heart-shaped locket with a photo of the couple at her platinum-record party in New York. For Christmas he gave her a ring. She bought him something more practical: a vintage Hasselblad camera. They took it to South Africa on safari together over Christmas. She thought the baboons were kangaroos. He was kind and funny about setting her straight.

It would be the last time Amy designed her own bridesmaid's dress.

She wants to show *Blender* her journal. It's full of new lyric fragments, chords, photos and some sketches: of Morgan asleep, of seahorses she drew at an aquarium in New Zealand.

She has recorded some dreams in it as well. Last night, she dreamed she was dying of thirst. Her father gave her water, but her thirst was unquenchable, and it became clear that she would die. Her father told her to calm down, that she still had a few hours to live. She wasn't sure if he cared.

An unusual dream, she says. Typically, she's not a victim in her dreams — she's the murderer, the monster.

"But I'm not like that," she protests. "I really love people."

* * * * *

LATER THAT EVENING, Evanescence open their Australian tour at Brisbane's Convention Center. A poll in today's local newspaper declares Brisbane residents the happiest in Australia. *Blender* is curious to see how Evanescence fare in front of such an audience. What can the band possibly have to say to these jolly people?

The drapes fall away, and beneath their logo — a lethal-looking Frisbee — Lee and her band work their dark spell. Without her, Evanescence might be mere nü-metal journeymen. But Lee's near-operatic voice and spellbinding, wraith-like presence raise them above the ordinary. The first chords of "Bring Me to Life" are greeted with a roar, then awed silence. Covering Soundgarden's "4th of July," she struts, poses and tosses her hair. Her drama coach would be proud.

"Once, I couldn't even raise my eyes to people," she had said earlier. "But I'm ready to face anything now." [BLENDER]

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EDITED BY DAN COSTA
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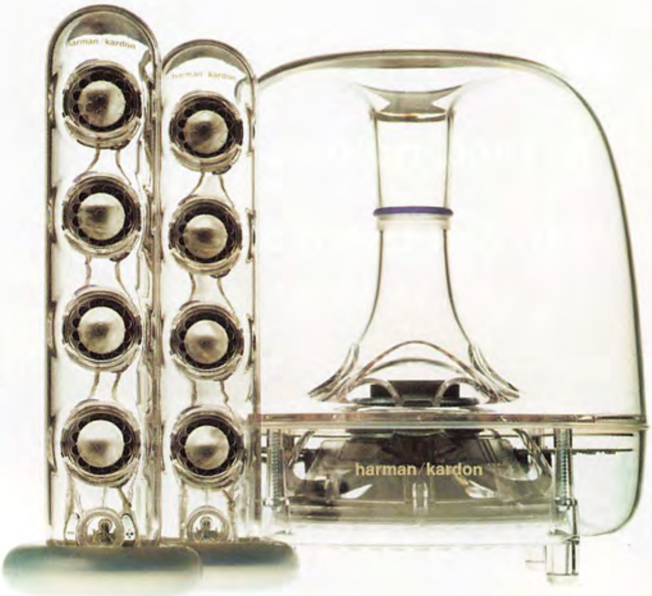

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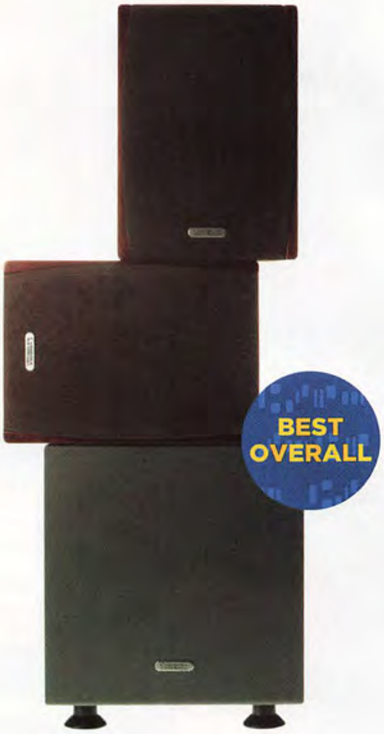

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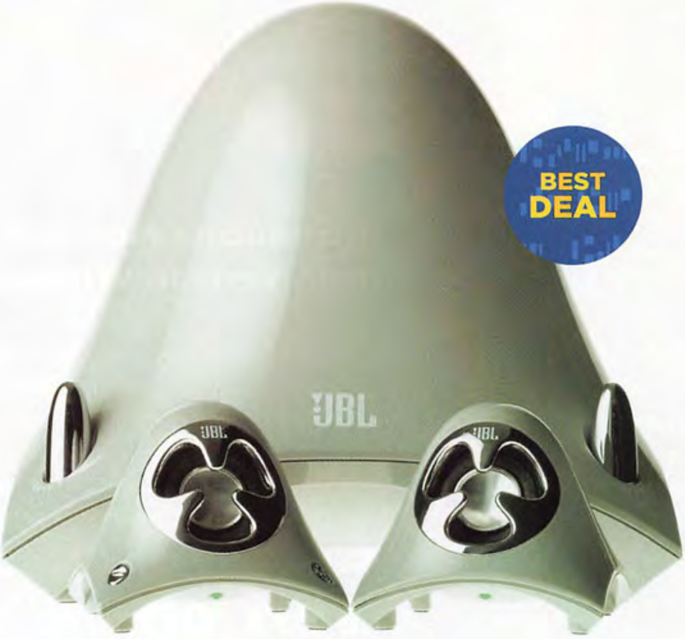

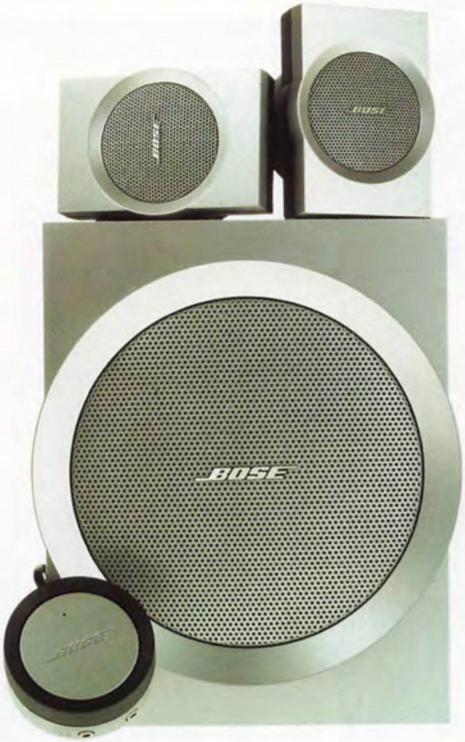

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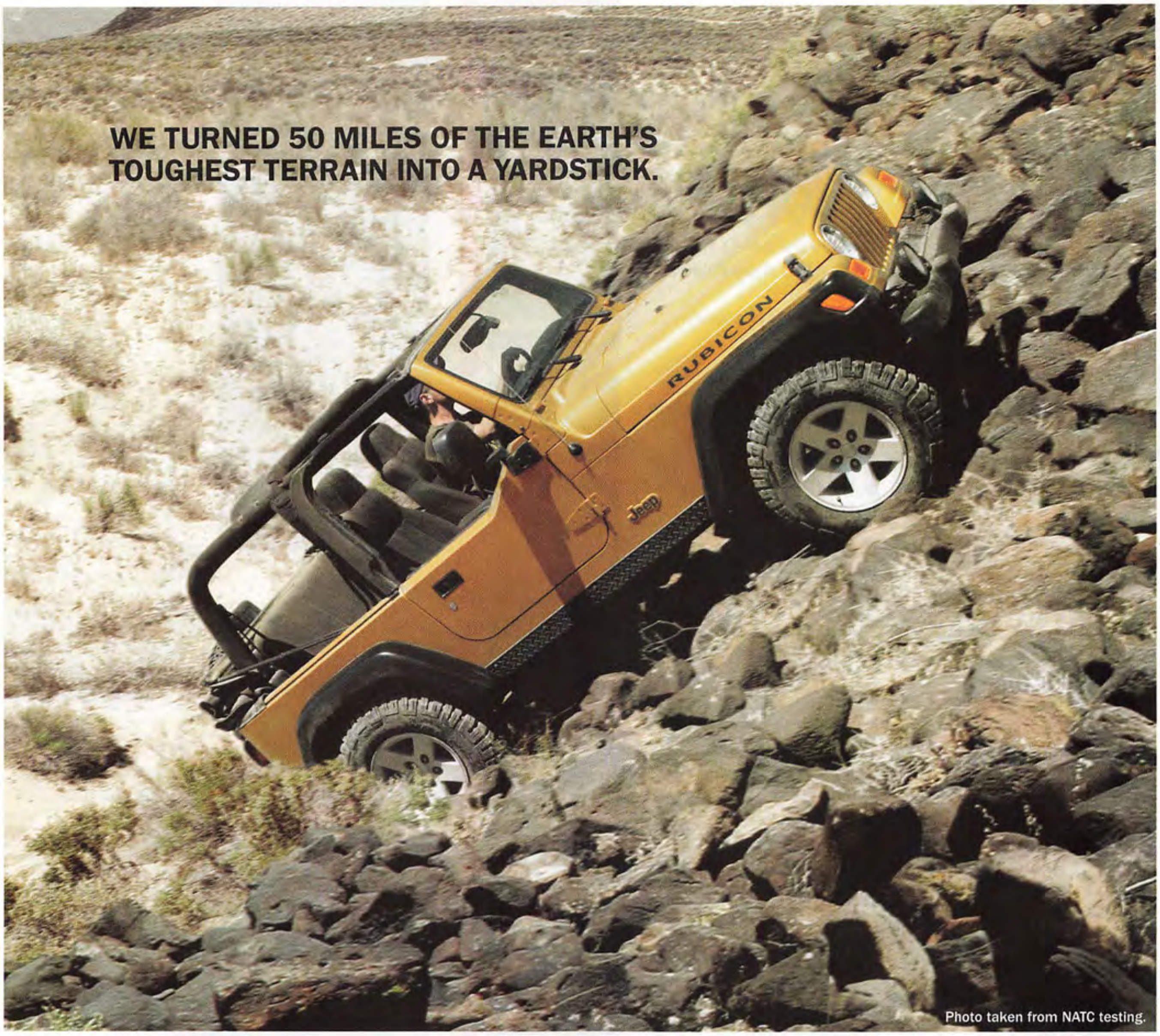
EXPERT TIP

BE GRACEFUL. Look for car components that use the Gracenote Music Management System — it's easier to handle with one hand on the wheel.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Download Here!

You've got the technology, but where are the tunes? They're right here — but which music site is best? By Noah Robischon

ITUNES MUSIC STORE

apple.com/itunes

BEST OVERALL

Selection More than 500,000 tracks in the library. Test #1: "Friday Night" by the Darkness is in stock. Test #2: The store does not carry anything by Geto Boys, but suggested a Backstreet Boys single instead.

Choicest Cut The Flaming Lips' three-song 1991 major-label debut.

Price 99 cents per song and $9.99 for most albums.

Yesterday's Top-Selling Download Britney Spears, "Toxic"

Big Selling Point Although iTunes tracks are encoded to play only on iPod devices, iTunes Music Store is still the most complete music-download site there is.

COOLEST MASCOT

NAPSTER

napster.com

Selection More than 500,000 songs. The Darkness's "Friday Night" is available, and there are 48 tunes by Geto Boys — but not the one *Blender* wanted, "Damn It Feels Good to Be a Gangsta."

Choicest Cut The Strokes playing "Soma" live in Iceland.

Price 99 cents per song (as low as 80 cents for premium members).

Yesterday's Top-Selling Download Nickelback, "How You Remind Me"

Big Selling Point The underground cachet is gone, but the record industry's 800-pound gorilla, Universal Music Group, is the service's new sugar daddy.

GOOD FOR ALBUMS!

BUYMUSIC

buymusic.com

Selection More than 400,000 songs, with 150,000 to be added soon. The Darkness's "Friday Night" is for sale. In lieu of Geto Boys, BuyMusic suggests the Pet Shop Boys' "West End Girls."

Choicest Cut Gotan Project's remix of Sarah Vaughan's "Whatever Lola Wants."

Price 99 cents, but 100,000 tunes sell for 79 cents.

Yesterday's Top-Selling Download Sarah McLachlan, "Fallen"

Big Selling Point It's one of the few stores to sell Radiohead and Linkin Park, two bands that allow entire-album downloads only (snobs!).

HEADPHONE-FRIENDLY!

REALPLAYER MUSIC STORE

real.com

Selection More than 350,000 songs, including "Friday Night" by the Darkness. Instead of "Damn It Feels Good to Be a Gangsta," Real recommended "Poppin' Them Thangs" by G-Unit.

Choicest Cut Home demo tracks by the Strokes.

Price 99 cents

Yesterday's Top-Selling Download Outkast, "Hey Ya!"

Big Selling Point Sound quality. Real uses a format similar to Apple's, but records the music at a higher bit rate — and the jukebox is iPod-compatible.

BESPOKE DOWNLOADS

MUSICMATCH

musicmatch.com

Selection More than 360,000 songs, including "Friday Night" by the Darkness. Although Geto Boys' "Damn It Feels Good to Be a Gangsta" was not offered for download, it can be heard on one of MusicMatch's streaming radio stations.

Choicest Cut Nothing exclusive

Price 99 cents

Yesterday's Top-Selling Download Britney Spears, "Toxic"

Big Selling Point It recommends new music based on your previous listening habits, and the PC jukebox is iPod-friendly.

INDIE-TASTIC!

EMUSIC

emusic.com

Selection Nearly 300,000 songs from 900 independent labels. That means nothing by the Darkness or Geto Boys — eMusic suggests we "check the spelling."

Choicest Cut Half the catalog is exclusive, including live shows by Mojo Nixon.

Price Starts at $9.95 per month for 40 downloads.

Yesterday's Top-Selling Download Eric Clapton, "Knockin' on Heaven's Door"

Big Selling Point It caters to the indie crowd and is the only store offering music in good old MP3 format.

CHEAPEST SONGS!

WAL-MART

musicdownloads.walmart.com

Selection More than 250,000 songs, but nothing at all by the Darkness or Geto Boys. Top artist match: Cape Verdean singer Boy Ge Mendes.

Choicest Cut Nothing exclusive until the Web site officially launches later this year.

Price 88 cents; $9.44 per album

Yesterday's Top-Selling Download Norah Jones, "Sunrise"

Big Selling Point Well, those prices can't be beat.

ONE TO WATCH

SONY CONNECT

No Web site yet

Selection More than 500,000 songs when the site launches in the spring.

Price 99 cents

Big Selling Point The brand name, and the number of appliances that carry it.

Fear of a Black Planet
Guns N' Roses
KID A
Norah Jones
The Clash
LONDON CALLING
THE STROKES
Saturday Night Fever
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G-Unit

FROM TOP

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belkin.com

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ARCHOS AV320

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archos.com

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Best of the Rest

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Photo
Audio Corder
Camera
Archos Video AV 300
2.0.00

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Music player
10. JayZ
Interlude
00:00
Options
Back

EXPERT TIP

CHECK YOUR LEVELS. Use software like MP3Gain (mp3gain.sourceforge.net) to adjust your files so they all play at the same volume.

Cool.

That's how I like my music and my milk. And just like my friends, I love to dance and rock out. Only now I get to do it in front of thousands of fans. Milk's 9 essential nutrients helped get me ready to rock. What's milk gonna get you ready for?

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RAPPER JIN

BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA

The smart money is on tomorrow's rap icons coming from New York's Chinatown — if they can live long enough. *Blender* investigates the extraordinary story of Asian hip-hop's first star — and the rapper who took a bullet for him

BY DOUGLAS CENTURY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL LEWIS

"YO, I'M JUST GLAD Chris was there for me," says Jin Au-Yeung, lowering his voice to a respectful whisper in the greenroom of BET's *106 & Park* in midtown Manhattan. The 21-year-old MC, known professionally as Jin, glances in the direction of his friend and fellow Chinese-American rapper Christopher Louie, a.k.a. L.S., a lanky 23-year-old who did what many gangstas talk about but few actually do: He took a bullet to save his friend's life.

The two rappers haven't seen each other since November 9, the night of the shooting, which occurred in a small Manhattan Chinatown bar called Yello. Jin, the latest member of DMX's Ruff Ryders recording crew, has returned to BET this afternoon to make an appearance on *Freestyle Friday*, the weekly battle that launched the Miami-born MC's career in 2002, when he won it an unprecedented seven straight weeks. His highly touted debut CD, *The Rest Is History*, due on March 23, will be the first major hip-hop release by a Chinese-American. L.S., leaning on a wooden cane and grimacing from the pain of the .40-caliber slug that tore through his back, has limped his way out of Bellevue Hospital and into the CBS Broadcast Center, where BET tapes, to show his support.

New York's tabloids played up the shooting as a case of Asian gang violence invading hip-hop: an aspiring rapper, linked to the notoriously violent Ghost Shadows gang, shooting at a fledging hip-hop star who had gone Hollywood (Jin starred alongside Ludacris in *2 Fast 2 Furious*). Online fan forums buzzed with rumors about Jin's supposed criminal affiliation ("What! Jin's a gangsta?"), L.S.'s uncommon display of courage and the biggest mystery of all: Who shot L.S.?

The official response from the New York Police Department offers little information beyond the bare-bones facts. "Male Asian shot in the lower back at 2 o'clock in the morning after arguing with five other male Asians," an NYPD spokesperson read to *Blender* after checking the logbook of Manhattan's Fifth Precinct.

"When I saw the gun poppin' off, I just had to jump in."
RAPPER CHRISTOPHER LOUIE, A.K.A. "L.S."

L.S. is understandably circumspect about a shooting that remains officially unsolved. "It was some stupid shit," he tells *Blender*. "But when I saw it poppin' off, I just had to jump in. I brought Jin to Yello," he says with a trace of remorse. "I showed him that spot."

For his part, speaking softly and cryptically in the crowded BET greenroom, Jin calls the incident "unfortunate." "The papers tried to make it out like it was some big Asian gang war," he demurs. "But there's not an Asian gang war. Whenever you put yourself into the public eye, not everyone is going to love you. It doesn't go beyond that."

Despite Jin's protestations, though, there is more to the shooting than he will allow. *Blender* undertook its own investigation, a six-week odyssey into the crowded, curving streets of Manhattan's Chinatown, into the lives of these two Chinese-American rappers and friends who spit Cantonese slang into their hip-hop and throw around the word *chink* the way other rappers drop *nigga*. What emerged is a story of two children of Chinese immigrants steeped in hip-hop, and a third rogue MC hellbent for glory. And it's a tale of the collision of two disparate cultures: the closed society of the Chinese gangsters, with their centuries-old codes of secrecy and suspicion of outsiders, and New York hip-hop, with its penchant for airing all personal beefs on mix tapes and in nightclubs.

* * *

WHILE ASIAN-AMERICANS from New York to California have been part of hip-hop culture for decades, they have →

Mark Mann (Jin)

古天樂
向海嵐
佘詩曼
票價: $108, $78, $48
Mark G. Etess Arena Trump Taj Mahal Casino Resort Atlantic City, NJ
Jan 24, 2004 (SATURDAY) 1:00AM

L.S., a.k.a.
Christopher Louie,
January 2004

CLOTHES BY **TROOP**

primarily played the roles of break-dancers, graffiti artists and DJs, with the occasional MC such as Miami's Fresh Kid Ice (of 2 Live Crew) spicing the mix. The truth is that Asians have not always felt welcome in hip-hop; tensions were badly frayed in 1991 when Ice Cube released the song "Black Korea," which offered a venomous denunciation of "Oriental one-penny-countin' muthafuckas."

But now with Virgin Records muscle and Ruff Ryders street cred behind him, Jin's single "Learn Chinese," produced by Wyclef Jean, is poised to be the first record ever to bring an unapologetically Sinocentric point of view to a predominantly black cultural form ("Every time they harass me/I want to explode/We should ride the trains for free/We built the railroads").

"There have been Asian MCs before, real dope cats, maybe even better than me," Jin observes. "But now people are touting me as the first prominent one on a mass level, and it's a lot of pressure on my shoulders."

"What makes Jin incredible," says Wyclef Jean, "is that he's not scared to address the issues of his culture. Jin is the first rapper to speak to the stereotypes people have toward Asians, dropping lines like 'Timberlands are made in China.' We should all celebrate that."

L.S. is another Asian rapper harboring crossover dreams. He has built a considerable underground reputation on the mix-tape circuit, and his management is currently shopping his demo in search of a major-label deal. He and Jin have recorded a number of duets together in which they play up their good-guy-meets-bad-guy personas to the hilt.

"Me and him, we're like the exact opposite, but we're the exact same," Jin says. "I couldn't describe it any other way. We're the exact opposite, but we're the exact same."

Jin, five-foot-seven and hyperkinetic onstage, is admittedly middle-class, with the boyish face, superior freestyle skills and clever, self-deprecating punch lines that draw obvious comparisons to a certain Mr. Mathers. L.S. — lankier, sleepy-eyed and more languid in his delivery — is shaping up to be Chinese hip-hop's answer to 50 Cent, right down to the bullet-scarred torso and gangsta taunts ("Fuck kung-fu — we know *gun-fu*!" he rhymes). His lyrics depict life in the "yellow slums" and reflect a past spent soldiering for the Ghost Shadows, for which he paid a sizable price.

> **"Jin isn't afraid to address stereotypes. He's incredible."**
> WYCLEF JEAN

← L.S. (far left) and friends outside Yello, where the rapper was shot last November

Proceed with caution: Outside Yello, Chinatown's hip-hop clubhouse

↓ L.S. with his father, businessman David Louie

"I was in jail when Jin was winning freestyle battles," L.S. says. He served six months behind bars for an illegal gun conviction and has five years of probation ahead. "That's how I heard about him. Cats were in the dorm talking about this Chinese kid on BET winning battles seven weeks in a row. And when I came home and met him, I was like, 'Yo, you gotta come chill with me — you gotta come down to Yello.' "

* * * * *

IT'S ONLY A 15-minute drive from West 57th Street to the dark, elbow-shaped bend in Mulberry Street just east of the New York State Supreme Courthouse, but culturally and philosophically, you might as well be a thousand miles from midtown's media towers. This is a street that holds a tight grip on its secrets, a shadowy brick-tenement block steeped in gangster tradition for centuries. It's right on the edge of what was once known as the Five Points, the murderous slum chronicled in Herbert Asbury's classic 1927 book *The Gangs of New York* (the source for Martin Scorsese's 2002 film).

Yello itself is a narrow storefront bar huddled next to a Chinese funeral parlor whose hearses are often double-parked on the sidewalk in front. Downstairs you'll still find an older Asian crowd doing Hong Kong karaoke routines, and old-timers will tell you that in the heyday of the Chinese underworld, the headline-making 1980s, the bar was called Jeanie's, a known chill-out spot for some of Chinatown's most brutal gangsters.

"Jeanie's was so wild," says one 23-year-old Chinatown resident, "that my parents used to warn me not to even walk on the sidewalk in front of it."

These days, Yello's upstairs lounge is packed with fashionable young Asian-Americans, gorgeous long-haired girls in low-slung pants with spidery tattoos on their backs and bottle openers tucked on their hips, grooving to the requisite Jay-Z and G-Unit beats. But nothing amps the Yello crowd like the sound of Jin and L.S. rapping on the tracks "Chinatown" and the ultimate Yello anthem — sure to be heard three times on a Saturday night — "What Up Fam?", which contains Jin's shout-out to a pan-Asian hip-hop nation: "Chinese, Koreans, Viets and Filipinos/Tryin' to do for Asians what [Big] Pun did for Latinos!"

It's a crowd that knows its hip-hop, and over chicken wings and cocktails, you'll find fans debating into the wee hours whether it was wise for Jin to come out with a self-consciously race-based track like "Learn Chinese."

"It's a double-edged sword for Jin," says Erik Teng, president of the Dream Vision Group, a talent-management company, who's a regular at Yello. "He comes out with a song like 'Learn Chinese,' and some people are going to say that it's a novelty record. On the other hand, if he goes the other direction and does straight hip-hop, a lot of haters would be like, 'Who does he think he is? →

Tim Soter (3)

Featuring: **BIG GIPP** **HUGH HEFNER**

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He forgot where he came from.' "

Teng predicts that Jin will spearhead a wave of Chinese-American hip-hop and R&B mirroring the Latin explosion of the 1990s and reflecting the dramatic increase in America's Asian population. According to the most recent U.S. census, New York City's Asian population grew 60 percent from 1990 to 2000, and Asian-Americans, with their high household incomes and rates of post-secondary education, make for an untapped demographic.

"Jin's got the best of both worlds," says Lionel Ridenour, executive vice president of urban music at Virgin. "He was validated by *Freestyle Friday* on BET, giving him credibility in the black community, but at the same time he doesn't run away from the growing Asian hip-hop culture."

In New York, from Manhattan to Flushing, Queens, it's now possible to find predominantly Asian hip-hop parties every night of the week at clubs like Trust and Exit. It's such an insular and competitive scene that some club owners and promoters have come to regard Asian parties as more violence-prone than traditional hip-hop nights.

"I don't know what it is," says Adam Lublin, who promotes weekly hip-hop nights at the Manhattan clubs Cheetah and NV, "but whenever you have a predominantly Asian event, there are more fights than any other night. They tend to be smaller guys, but throwing punches like you wouldn't believe."

L.S. smiles when *Blender* relays this assessment. "It's true. That's why when I roll through an Asian party, I roll deep. There's always fights."

Not this night at Yello, though. Red bandanna wrapped around his forehead, L.S. is chilling in a booth with a plate of chicken wings, lounging comfortably not even 15 feet from the spot where he was nearly shot dead. He needs to stop drinking, he tells *Blender,* then reaches into his coat and pulls out a packet of the prescription painkillers that his doctor told him to pop every few hours. Moments later, he stands up excitedly and raps along to his own verse from a track called "Long Road Ahead."

L.S. has been walking with a cane since November.

Jin with Paul Walker and Tyrese in *2 Fast 2 Furious*

"Welcome to Chinatown/Home of the gangstas wildin'/Home of the gamblin' houses where they flash the diamonds/ Ghost Shadows and the Flying Dragons/ Irons clashin'/You know you can't deny the action. . . . "

Pleased with his performance, L.S. grabs a friend and ducks out for a smoke. Puffing Newports in a concrete basketball court across Mulberry Street, L.S. and his friend (we'll call him C.) take *Blender* on a little excursion back through Chinatown's gangland history.

"When I lived this gangster shit, back in the 1980s, that's when shit was crazy," L.S. says. "It ain't like that anymore. You still got some gangster shit, but it's more or less like street thugs. The people I'm reppin', they be the O.G.'s. We call them *dai-los*" — roughly equivalent to the Mafia rank of *capo,* or captain.

Veteran police officials confirm L.S.'s assessment. Retired NYPD detective Derrick Parker, who spent years in the force's Gang Intelligence Unit, said, "Chinatown's come down a lot as far as gang activity. Back in the '80s, with the war between the Ghost Shadows and Flying Dragons, you had too many bodies to keep count."

Yet recent events point to a renewed outbreak of gang warfare. On January 17, a wild shootout featuring an AK-47 submachine gun and various pistols occurred outside the Super Taste House restaurant on Division Street, leaving one 30-year-old dead and a 27-year-old wounded.

"The little kids nowadays, they want to bring it back again," L.S. says. "But by me rapping about it, telling them what →

Hip Sing leader Eddie Gong draws his knives.

Gangs of New York

Chinese social clubs known as *tongs* have long been suspected fronts for superviolent street gangs. Here are the most notorious

ON LEONG

REIGN 1890s to present
BRIEF HISTORY The original *tong* in Manhattan's Chinatown, the On Leong ran a lucrative empire of gambling houses, brothels and opium dens.
INFAMOUS FOR The 1909 shooting war with the rival Hip Sing *tong,* which left some 50 dead.

HIP SING

REIGN 1890s to present
BRIEF HISTORY Led by the notorious Mock Duck, who was once attacked by a hatchet- and knife-wielding mob in a Pell Street doorway.
INFAMOUS FOR During an August 1905 performance at the Chinese Opera House on Doyers Street, Hip Sing gangsters in the front and rear rows suddenly stood up, turned on the On Leong and opened fire with their .44s.

GHOST SHADOWS

REIGN Mid-1970s to present
BRIEF HISTORY After bloody wars with the Flying Dragons and White Eagles, the Ghost Shadows rose to control some of the most lucrative turf in Chinatown.
INFAMOUS FOR Their propensity for violence, which in 1985 led to the first successful RICO prosecution of a Chinese gang.

Medics tend to the injured after a Flying Dragon drive-by, 1982

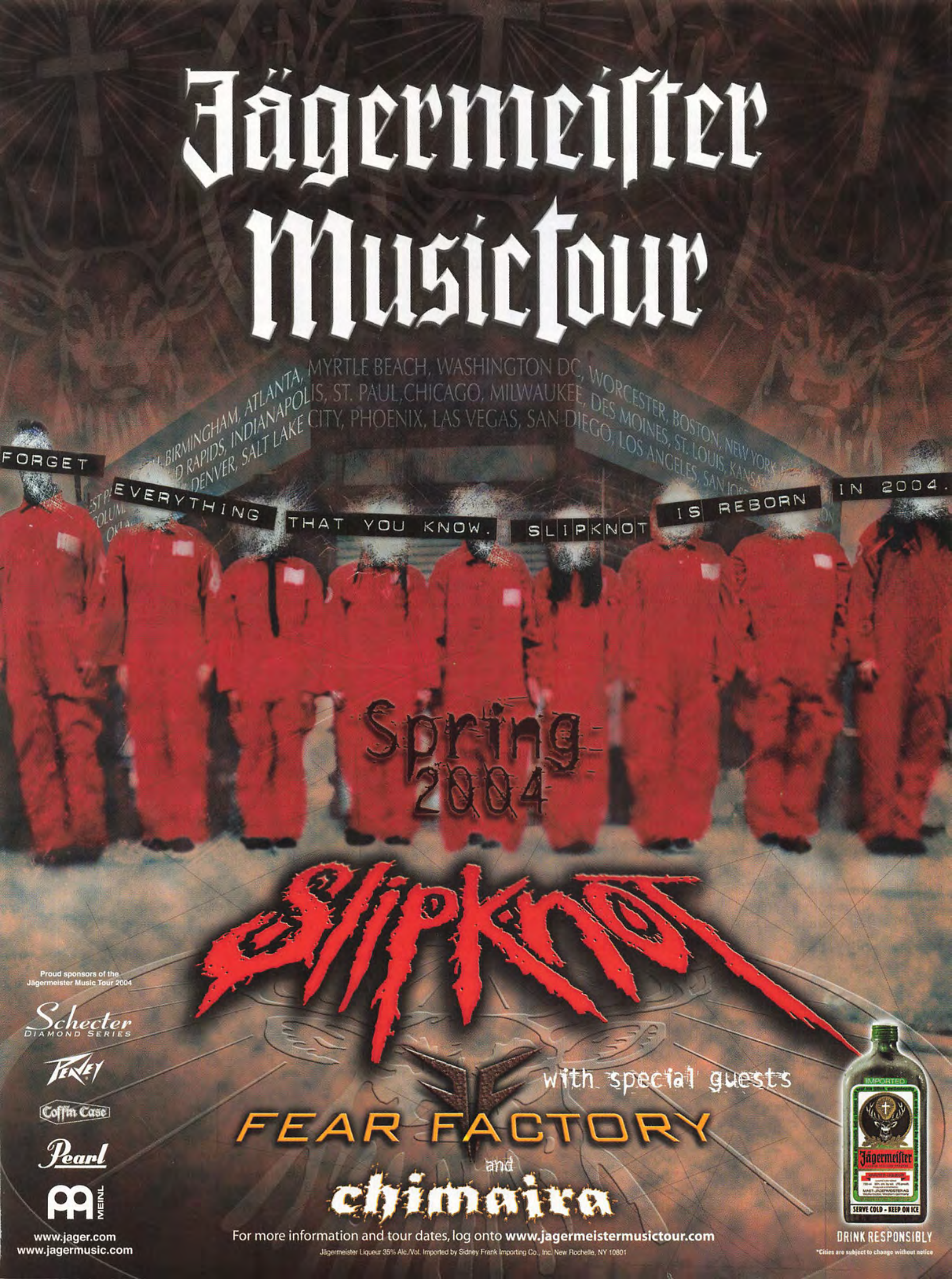
FLYING DRAGONS

REIGN 1970s to present
BRIEF HISTORY Archrivals of the Ghost Shadows, the Flying Dragons were said to control much of the heroin smuggling in New York.
INFAMOUS FOR The early-'80s turf wars with the Ghost Shadows and Born to Kill *tongs,* which left dozens dead in Chinatown.

FUK CHING

REIGN Mid-1980s to present
BRIEF HISTORY Made up mostly of immigrants from Fujian province, the Fuk Ching are specialists in "snakehead" operations — the illegal importation of immigrants from China.
INFAMOUS FOR The 1993 *Golden Venture* disaster, which left 10 people dead when a cargo ship carrying 300 Chinese migrants ran aground in icy waters off Queens. *DOUGLAS CENTURY*

Bettmann/Corbis (Gangs of New York, 2); Michael Lewis (L.S.)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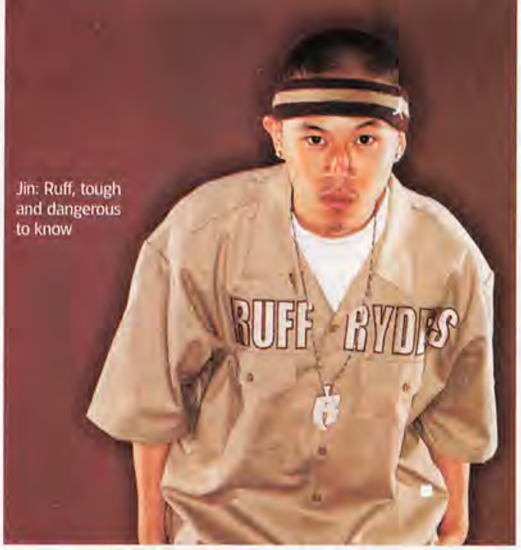

Jin: Ruff, tough and dangerous to know

Reputed gang member G-Kay; his mug shot (inset)

I've been through, it's more to let them know: 'Yo, son, that's not the life.' "

L.S. and C. reminisce about their days wilding as juveniles, engaging in gun battles and machete slashings. Baby-faced, with a bare wisp of a black mustache, C. smiles as he recalls the easy life of a Ghost Shadow gang member, eating free meals daily at Mott Street restaurants (even today, Mott and Mulberry Streets remain staunch Ghost Shadow territory) and extorting at will from gambling spots and prostitution joints. "Those are the best for shakedowns, because they can't go to the cops," he says. "The way it works down here, the prostitution spots don't just pay one gang, they pay all the gangs. They don't want drama with nobody."

In the '80s and even early '90s, the Ghost Shadows favored tight straight-leg black jeans, satin jackets and little kung-fu slippers. And the dead giveaway: Hair tips dyed blond.

"That's how you could always tell who was down with the gangster life," L.S. says. "And the number one thing you heard back then was, 'Who you wit'?' or 'Where you from?' Down here it's all about what block you're reppin'. That's why in my lyrics you'll hear me giving them all props: Mott Street, Bayard Street, East Broadway, Pell Street. . . . I tell 'em all, 'Stand up! Represent.' "

* * * * *

IT TAKES *BLENDER* several Grey Goose–and-tonic–fueled weekends in Yello to finally hear the unvarnished story of how L.S. got shot — a story that almost everyone in Yello seems to know but won't testify to, in the event the case ever goes to court.

"It's the old crabs-in-a-barrel story," says one young Chinese male, dressed all in black, sitting on a barstool in Yello. "It's sad to say, but even within the Asian community, you'll still find that attitude among a minority: 'I can't stand to see another Asian cat make it. There's not room for two of us at the top.' "

On November 9, when L.S. invited Jin to come hang out at Yello — it was Jin's last time setting foot in the bar — there was, according to one patron, "this group of cats hatin' hard on Jin. Just jealousy. That's all it was. And also this attitude of 'OK, let's see what this nigga's made of.' "

This group of five men, the NYPD asserts, included 22-year-old Raymond Yu, a reputed Ghost Shadow member known throughout Chinatown by his rap moniker, G-Kay. Sometime around 2 in the morning, G-Kay and his crew drew two guns, intending to rob Jin. Jin dashed behind one of the 20-foot-high maroon curtains and disappeared into Yello's kitchen. "It was made to look like a robbery," says one witness. "But really, they were trying to punk Jin, make him look like a bitch. They wanted to take away any street cred he might have. But what they didn't count on was L.S. This nigga got more heart than anybody I've ever seen."

L.S., according to everyone interviewed, saved Jin's life by stepping up to the assailants even though he was unarmed. Heated words were exchanged, and, witnesses allege, G-Kay shot L.S. in the back with a .40-caliber semiautomatic before fleeing.

"They were trying to punk Jin. But they didn't count on L.S."
EYEWITNESS TO THE SHOOTING

G-Kay is now on the run from the law. Remarkably, though, he still has an active Web site filled with lyrics, MP3s and photos that display a fondness for Yao Ming jerseys, handguns, cash-strewn tables and classic gangsta bravado.

From his Web bio, posted long before the shooting at Yello: "There are a few dozen New Yorkers who are sleeping easier these days now that Queens-based rapper G-Kay is spending the majority of his time in a recording studio. Among them are the people he shot, robbed, beat up, stabbed and — oh yeah — chased down with a machete." The site goes on to list other highlights of G-Kay's résumé, which includes membership in the Ghost Shadows, a gift for witness tampering and a prison stint for attempted murder.

None of the witnesses interviewed by *Blender* in Chinatown disputed G-Kay's none-too-subtle self-portrait, although one described him as more of a "wild cowboy" than a respected figure in the Chinese underworld.

"He's in deep shit with the Ghost Shadows for this," says one source. "This nigga is so stupid. He really fucked up by shooting L.S. He fucked himself and his whole career."

* * * * *

IN HIS BOOK *The Gangs of New York*, Herbert Asbury paints a vivid portrait of a legendary top-ranking Chinese *tong* member of the early 1900s named Mock Duck, who was shot at more often than any other gangster in Chinatown but felled by bullets only once: "Mock Duck was in the Hudson Hospital for three weeks, and then came out whole and healthy and filled with a craving for revenge."

A century later, the same description might apply to L.S., although his chosen method of revenge, for now at least, is the dis track.

Early in 2004, L.S. dropped a devastating song (available on mix tapes and the Internet) called "Last Laugh." While L.S. is still reluctant to discuss his alleged assailant with *Blender*, the lyrics of "Last Laugh" couldn't be more explicit, rhyming furiously over the beat to Mobb Deep's "Shook Ones (Part II)."

"What was you thinkin' when you went after Jin/That I was gonna sit there and not jump in?/Don't you know I'm as real as they get?/You a coward-ass nigga, 'cause you shot me in my back!"

The track ends with a diatribe laced with the most genuinely murderous rage since Tupac recorded his classic anti-Biggie primal scream "Hit 'Em Up":

"G-Kay, you ain't shit, claiming you the most feared gang member in Chinatown!" L.S. spits. "Fuck! You think the Shadows got your back? Nigga, they laughin' at you right now! You can't even show your face on my streets, nigga. Don't even come to Chinatown. You hidin' like Osama bin Laden right now. Fuckin' bitch-ass nigga!"

One of the Yello regulars nods in somber agreement. "It's true. G-Kay can't even show his face in Chinatown now. And right now he better hope that the NYPD catches his ass first." [BLENDER]

Mark Mann (Jin); courtesy of NYPD (mug shot); G-Kay.com (G-Kay)

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The Tao of Kylie

We could have put Life's Big Questions to a philosopher or a priest. But we thought it would be more fun to ask pocket-sized Australian pop princess **Kylie Minogue** instead. And we were right!

BY ADRIAN DEEVOY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TODD BARRY

AS AN OMNIPRESENT international celebrity, Kylie Minogue is no stranger to unfounded gossip, but this one persistent item, as Australians are wont to say, is making her shit itch.

"Do I *look* pregnant?" she demands, rising to her full five feet, one inch and lifting her black sweater so that we might better inspect her bare stomach.

Blender is no physician, but Minogue doesn't appear to be with child. "I might have put on a bit of weight," she frowns, pinching a spare millimeter of skin. "Am I . . . heavier?"

In the physical sense, *heavy* isn't a word you would normally associate with the Hardest-Working Diva in Discodom. She has, after all, the physique of a fairy.

But — be warned — unlike the pouting poppet she has skillfully portrayed for more than half of her 35 years, Kylie Minogue is no lightweight.

Do not be distracted by her thigh-length black leather boots and her jeans, which are currently tighter than her work schedule. Do not be sidetracked by the fact that she's now digging down the back of these spray-on pants to show you the label on her underwear. (And it truly is her underwear — Love Kylie brand. She co-owns the company.)

> "The soul is infinite, and we're just passing through."

Show steely resolve when she giggles girlishly and plants a perfumed peck on your cheek, for Kylie Minogue is no pop pushover. She is a formidable and complex woman with a daringly spare new dance record, *Body Language*, and she has ridden a rollercoaster career that would have disposed of an entire army of bed-wetting metallers.

She has lived and loved like a Rat Packer — her boyfriends have included Lenny Kravitz, the late Michael Hutchence and her current beau, actor Olivier Martinez — and made more money than most platinum-selling rappers. She is, lest we forget, a woman who duetted with Nick Cave and survived.

Minogue paces across her spacious suite in Manhattan's Mercer Hotel displaying little of the toothsome innocence that has won her a worldwide audience ranging from Japanese preteens to San Francisco drag queens. (Such is the strength of her gay fan base that she is in New York now to appear as a celebrity guest on *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*). Appropriately for this still and frosty afternoon, her demeanor is cool and serious.

A friend in London, where Minogue is based, describes her as "a lady with a business brain that could snare a grizzly bear, and balls bigger than AC/DC," yet she is still perceived as little more than a model who got lucky.

"I'm used to it," she says with a shrug. "I'm the soap actress who got a few lucky breaks and who sings the song that goes '*La la la, la la la la la.*' There was no work involved at all. Everything just fell into my lap."

She graciously accepts a gift from *Blender*, a copy of Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet*, and is intrigued to learn that Elvis Presley always kept a copy of the spiritual guidebook at his bedside through his later years. "I read it when I was younger," she says, gazing at the cover. "But I'm definitely at a point where I want to read it again."

The poetic story of one man's journey for meaning takes our conversation into a different realm. Soon, Minogue is considering some of the great imponderables, and this, in turn, leads her to contemplate some of life's Really Big Questions.

The Tao of Kylie, anyone?

* * * * *

BLENDER: Do we have souls?

MINOGUE: Yes. The soul is the endlessness of our beings. The soul is infinite, and we're just passing through. The light that might normally flash VACANCY is flashing NO VACANCY at the moment. For this lifetime, my lifetime.

Is this all there is?

Well, I can't think that this is all there is. I just can't. It's a cliché, but there has to be more. From experiences with the deceased and with the sixth sense, even instinct, there must be much more than the here-and-now. I believe in a universal →

Styling: William Baker; makeup: Karen Alder; hair: Max Pinnell for Bumble & Bumble; manicure: Amy Lin

Kylie Minogue:
Really hot, *really*
scared of mice

power. That's how I would define spirituality: as something universal that we don't understand but that somehow governs and guides the aspects of our being that aren't merely physical.

Have we lived before?

I believe that I have, but that I'm not very far advanced in my series of lives. I'm not even into double figures. I don't have an especially visual memory or recall of my past lives, but I believe I came from somewhere and that I'm going somewhere beyond this life — so therefore I must have lived before.

BOOTY QUIZ!

Name That Ass!

Can you tell the difference between Kylie Minogue's much-admired bottom and other famous derrières? To find out, try to match these celebrity rumps with their respective owners!

SHAKIRA

EMINEM

JOHN LENNON AND YOKO ONO

CHER

KYLIE MINOGUE

ANSWERS 1: KYLIE MINOGUE; 2: JOHN LENNON AND YOKO ONO; 3: CHER; 4: EMINEM; 5: SHAKIRA

Kylie, with late-'80s hair

Is evolution still in its infancy?

I think we're very early in the evolutionary scale. We don't use a fraction of our brains yet. To be honest, mine is on "economy" some days, if it's switched on at all. Maybe we'll end up with chips in our heads. I often ask myself this question when I'm madly paddling away below the surface but not really getting anywhere. It frustrates me. So you end up asking yourself these eternal questions: "Where am I going? Why? What's the point?"

Does the body rule the mind, or does the mind rule the body?

You'll have to let me argue aloud with myself over this. My first thought is that the mind rules the body, but if that was the case, we would never get ill — unless the mind was thinking negative thoughts. Conversely, if you're in a room with someone who has the flu, you always end up convinced that you'll catch it. Does that make any sense?

All you need is love. True?

Ultimately, yes. Of course you need other forms of stimulation and endeavor, but it would be a sad and empty life without love. In literature and songs we always try to get away from the topic of love, but we keep coming back to the same old subjects: finding love, losing love, craving love, keeping love. We're meant to have come from love, after all.

> **"Big knickers are back. The G-string is last year's thing."**

Should we fear death?

If I'm being very honest, I do. I could say it's because I love life and there's so much left to do, but really, it would be the idea of my death upsetting the people who I love and who love me. That is very, very painful and therefore frightening and something to be dreaded. Because despite all this talk, we simply don't know what happens when we die.

Does heaven exist?

Well, I certainly don't think that there's an elevator that goes up to heaven and down into eternal damnation, but there has to be a peaceful place. And I believe that people who have lived good lives — and *good* is very difficult to define — will achieve peace.

Is there a God?

Yes. God is either a universal energy outside of us or a life force within us. Or both.

Why are we here?

You could argue that we're here only to procreate and further the human race, but I would like to think there's more to us than that. There are so many other things you should experience and achieve and feel in this life. But we also have to procreate, or else there would be no one left sitting around answering these questions.

* * * * *

STILL IN A gently philosophical mood, Minogue reminisces about the time she spent with Michael Hutchence in the early '90s. It was widely assumed that during their brief dalliance, the INXS frontman led wide-eyed Kylie down the road of rock & roll damnation and introduced her to the devil himself. "Oh, come on," she says, sighing. "We were both adults, but the public's perception of us as people just couldn't have been more different."

Hutchence died, hanged by his own belt, in Sydney, Australia, in 1997. Although the two had long since parted ways as a couple, they remained good friends, and Minogue is still regularly reminded of him.

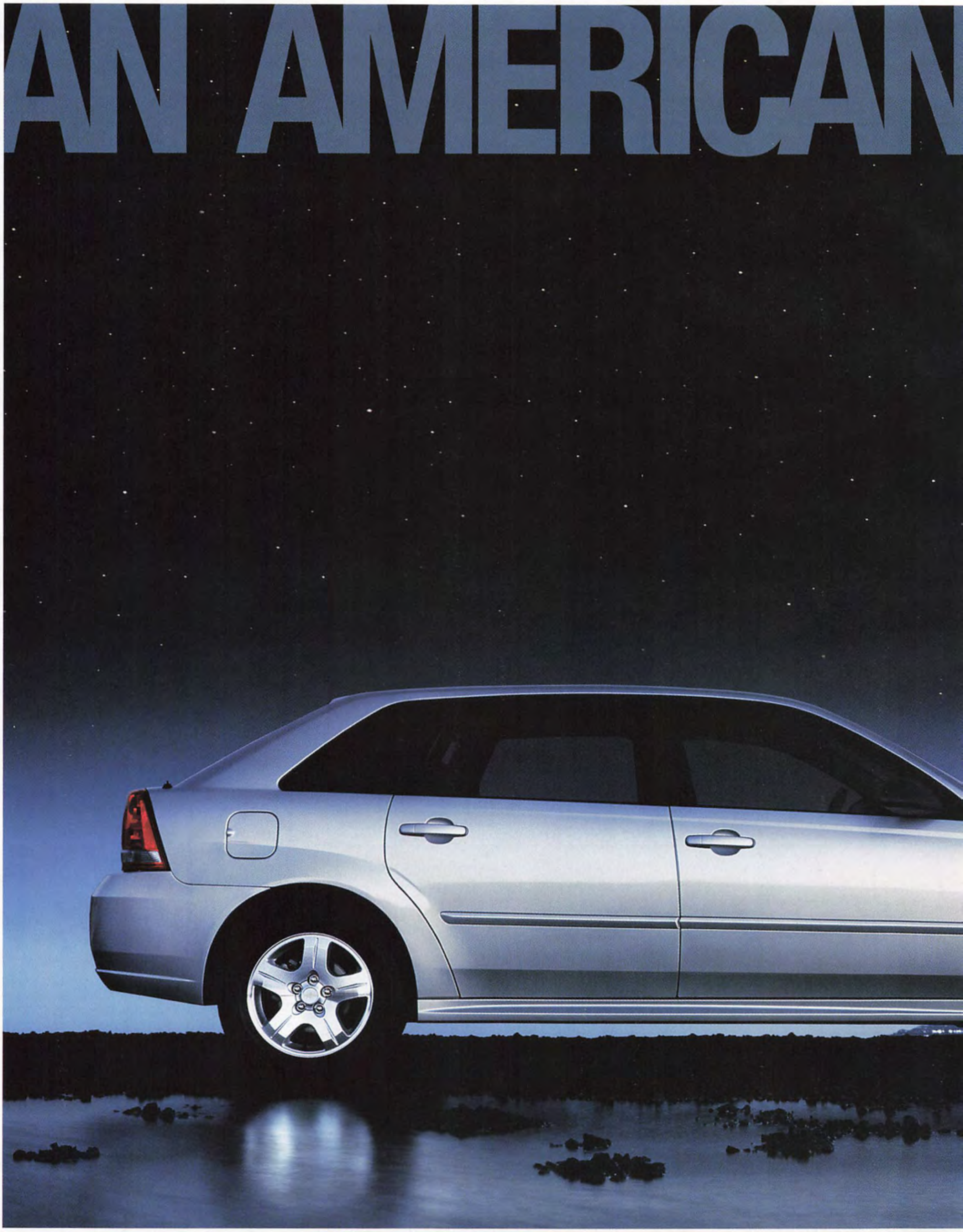
"Sometimes when people have passed, you feel as close if not closer to them," she says, smiling. "I've had one particularly intense experience that let me know Michael was still around, like he had come to say hello."

Sensing that we might be crossing the border between the professional and the personal, Minogue swiftly directs the discussion back to her underwear. Oh, well, if we must. . . .

"Big knickers are back," she decides, and once again digs into her denim to provide evidence. "Women want comfort again. And I don't mean that we're going to start wearing the sort of underwear our grandmothers wore. It'll be more French and sexy, but definitely bigger. The G-string is last year's thing." This small woman then announces with a big, loud laugh: "The thong is gone! The flossing has finished!" [BLENDER]

This page: Greg Noakes/Retna Ltd. (Minogue, top); Name That Ass!, from top: Kevin Mazur/WireImage.com; SUS/Camera Press/Retna Ltd.; Ron Wolfson/LFI; Splash News; Steve Granitz/WireImage.com. Opposite page: Todd Barry

No one does
Pouty Smile
#37 like Kylie.



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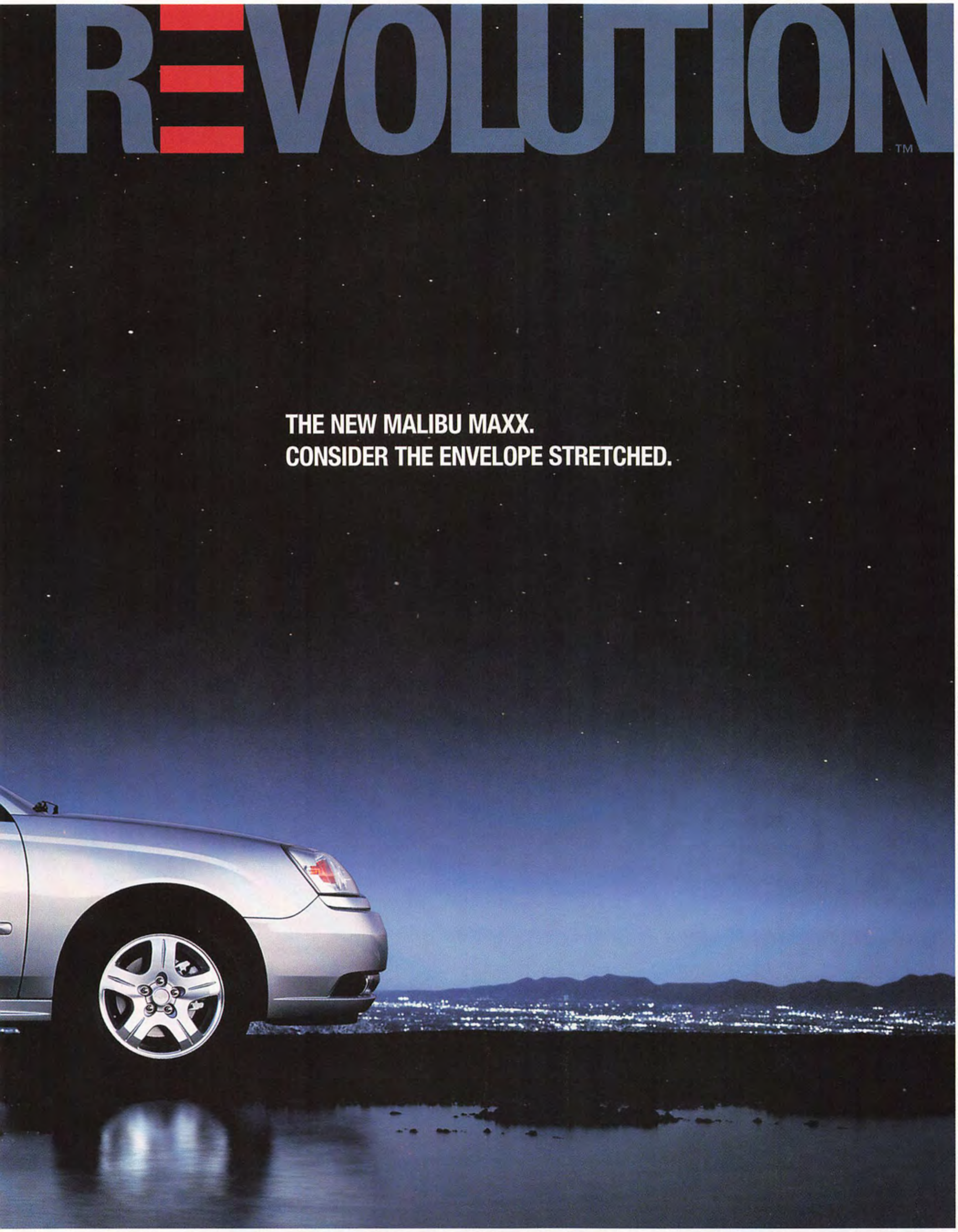
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THE 50 CRAZIEST POP STARS EVER!

SHOW US YOU'RE NUTS!

→ You don't *have* to be crazy to be a rock star. But let's just say the world (and this magazine) would be a far less colorful place without these 50 drug-addled, tantrum-throwing, Thorazine-gulping and/or just plain mad music maestros

BY JANE BUSSMAN, JOHNNY DAVIS, ANDREW HARRISON, STEVE KANDELL, BEN MITCHELL AND MICHAEL ODELL

Whitney Houston in Israel: "Oy vey, already!"

"I MAKE TOO MUCH TO SMOKE CRACK."
WHITNEY HOUSTON

Elton John: "Hey, do I have a sloth on my head?"

50

SIR ELTON JOHN

Candle in the wind. Supersize portions of cocaine up the nose

CASE HISTORY Alcoholism, consumerism, eating disorders and snorting fat piles of womble dust have all contributed to the legend of the piano diva. Touring Germany in the '70s, he phoned his agent and demanded he do something about the wind outside that was keeping him awake.

CRAZIEST MOMENT In denial, gay Elton married his female sound engineer Renate Blauel in 1984.

HE'S SO CRAZY "They can say I'm a fat old cunt, they can say I'm an untalented bastard, they can call me a poof, but they mustn't tell lies about me."

49

BRITNEY SPEARS

America's favorite sweetheart turned America's favorite blotto bride

CASE HISTORY Even before her January I-do/I-don't to hometown pal Jason Alexander, Spears had been regularly frightening her handlers with *Girls Gone Wild* antics. Jell-O shots, table dancing and panty-lowering were reported all but daily. She pulled out of a European tour citing "exhaustion." She also turned away a crowd that had waited in line all day for British TV's *The Graham Norton Show* because, she said, she had "brought my own audience."

CRAZIEST MOMENT Her drunken 55-hour Las Vegas marriage. "Plaintiff Spears . . . was incapable of agreeing to the marriage," read the annulment petition.

SHE'S SO CRAZY "I get to go to lots of overseas places, like Canada."

JAILBAIT-LOVING SOUL MAN

48

R. KELLY

Chart-topping R&B sensation, or poster boy for urination? Both!

CASE HISTORY He sleeps all day and plays basketball every midnight. He has been known not to change his underwear for days at a time and makes his wife knock first before entering rooms in her own house. Then, of course, there's his alleged enthusiasm for home-video hobbyism — plus those 21 counts of child pornography he's facing.

CRAZIEST MOMENT Secretly marrying the 15-year-old Aaliyah probably could have been better thought out.

HE'S SO CRAZY "Osama bin Laden is the only one who knows what I'm going through."

47

JIM MORRISON

Lived fast, died young, left a (fairly) good-looking corpse . . . in the bath

CASE HISTORY In the '60s, Morrison's method of opening "the doors of perception" was to guzzle booze and vacuum LSD and any other drugs he could get his hands on. Was dead in a bathtub by age 27 in 1971.

CRAZIEST MOMENT Married a witch in New York City. The happy couple drank each other's blood as part of a pagan ceremony.

46

SID VICIOUS

Insulted fans. May have killed his girlfriend. What a catch!

CASE HISTORY On the Sex Pistols' 1978 US tour, he beat fans with his guitar and carved GIMME A FIX into his chest with glass. Vicious met his match in junkie/lover Nancy Spungen; he was charged with her murder after she was found dead under a sink in a hotel room.

CRAZIEST MOMENT Released from detox in 1979, he overdosed on heroin and died in his sleep.

45

JAMES TAYLOR

Sensitive soul who found comfort in heroin and sanitariums

CASE HISTORY Taylor committed himself to McLean Hospital in Massachusetts for depression at age 17; he wrote his first songs during his year-long stint in the psych ward. Three years after getting out, he checked himself into a sanitarium in the Berkshires — this time, he was addicted to heroin.

CRAZIEST MOMENT Never really fully mental. His loopiest act was perhaps leaving McLean — *gasp!* — without waiting the full three days for his paperwork to go through.

44

CHUCK BERRY

Duck-walked underage prostitute across state line

CASE HISTORY Berry was sentenced to three years in jail in 1961 for transporting a 14-year-old prostitute across state lines for "immoral purposes," and in 1994 he was sued by 60 women for allegedly videotaping them in the bathroom of his Southern Air restaurant in Wentzville, Missouri.

CRAZIEST MOMENT Protected himself from allegations of rape by insisting that female fans strip and pose, smiling, for pictures with him before he'd have sex with them.

Elton John demanded that his agent do something about the wind outside that was keeping him awake.

43

MARIAH CAREY

Countless hits. Five octaves. Very few marbles

CASE HISTORY Carey's amateur eccentricity — spitting chewed gum into assistants' hands, kicking carsick journalists into the street — eventually blossomed into online breakdown announcements. Her spin doctors were quick to dismiss claims that she had slit her wrists: "Mariah did break some dishes, but she definitely did not hurt herself intentionally." (Mariah Carey? Doing *dishes?*) She finally went so bonkers that her record company gave her $50 million to go away.

CRAZIEST MOMENT Having her entourage force MTV Europe staff to play adoring fans when the real ones failed to show.

SHE'S SO CRAZY After her therapist gave her fruit, Carey insisted on crudités at all times: "I need to make sure this plate of vegetables is here."

42

LITTLE RICHARD

Invent rock & roll? Check. Watch people fondle your girlfriend? Check

CASE HISTORY By age 14, Richard Penniman had been beaten by his father for effeminacy, and sexually abused. On tour, Richard enjoyed watching his girlfriends being serviced by other musicians — including Buddy Holly, who Richard says was hung like a stallion. Cocaine abuse (and arrests in public bathrooms) followed. Richard wasted away to 115 pounds, became nearly schizophrenic and was almost shot over a coke deal.

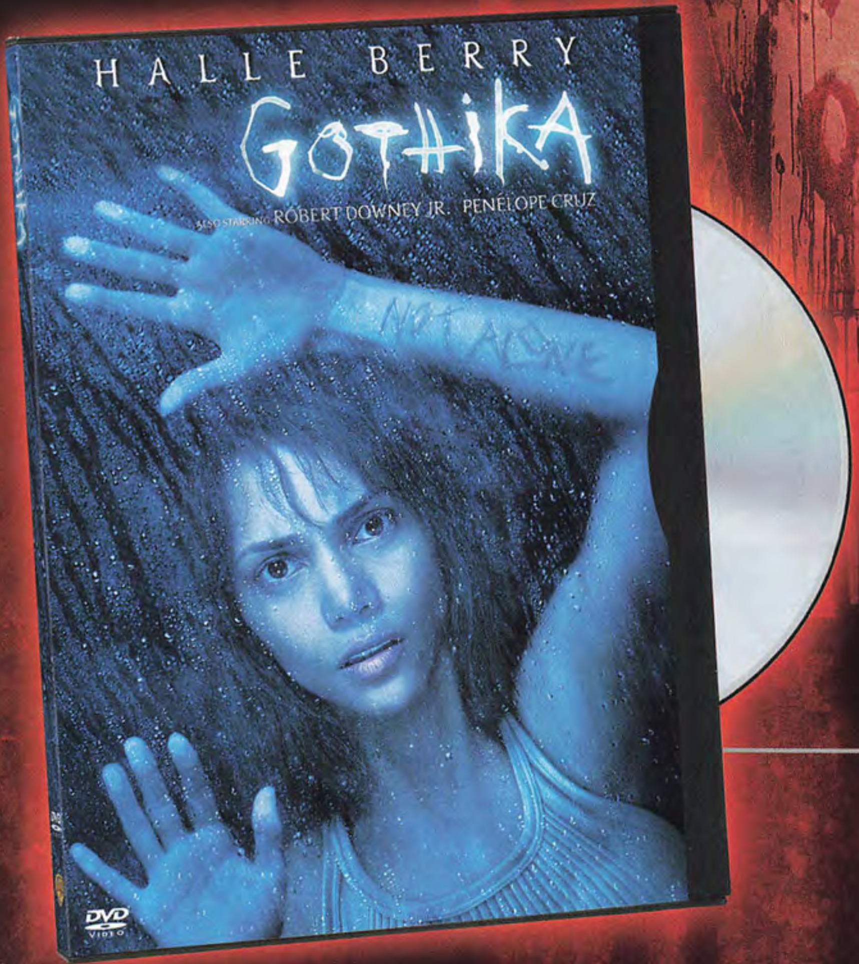
CRAZIEST MOMENT Once renounced rock & roll after a sign from God. (It was actually Sputnik flying over Australia.)

HE'S SO CRAZY "I had to scream like a white lady!"

Opening spread, from left: Alexander Sibaja/Getty Images; Y Levi/Israel Sun/Rex USA. This page, clockwise from top left: Ross Barnett/BAR-LFI; Alec Michael/Globe Photos; London Features/LFI; LFI; Splash News

"INSANELY CREEPY."

- Jeffrey K. Howard, ABC-TV



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David Bowie: Available for kids' parties, cocaine benders

41

DAVID BOWIE

Glam-rock-pioneering, Satan-exorcizing coke loon

CASE HISTORY Bowie's often erratic behavior reached its nadir during his mid-'70s Thin White Duke period: In the depths of cocaine psychosis, he became convinced Satan was living in his Los Angeles swimming pool, so he performed an exorcism.

CRAZIEST MOMENT In 1976, he greeted the world's media at London's Victoria Station with a Nazi salute.

HE'S SO CRAZY "Everybody says, 'Oh, yes, my family is quite mad.' Mine really is. No fucking about. Most of them are nutty — in, just out of, or going into an institution. Or dead."

40

SERGE GAINSBOURG

Put the *French* and *pervert* into "French pervert"

CASE HISTORY Gainsbourg was an eccentric French songwriting pervert whose work included *Rock Around the Bunker* (an album of Nazi songs) and "Lemon Incest," a duet with his 14-year-old daughter. He refused to stop drinking even after two-thirds of his liver was removed. He died in his bedroom at age 62 in 1991.

CRAZIEST MOMENT Once introduced himself to Whitney Houston on France's equivalent of *The View* by saying, "I want to fuck you."

HE'S SO CRAZY "There's a trilogy in my life, an equilateral triangle, shall we say, of Gitanes, alcoholism and girls."

SEX-CRAZED JAZZ LEGEND

39

MILES DAVIS

Jazz icon tried to beat drugs. Succeeded in beating wife

CASE HISTORY Addicted to heroin starting in the early 1950s, when he was rescued from living on the street by trumpeter Clark Terry, Davis repaid him by ransacking his apartment for drug money. He was an infamous wife-beater — his first fled in fear for her life — and was notorious for wandering offstage after playing just a few notes.

CRAZIEST MOMENT Davis once demanded that pianist Bill Evans have sex with each of the men in his band. Evans refused.

HE'S SO CRAZY "Some notes you get better in a specific spot on the stage. If I play a high note and don't hear it, I'll move."

38

CARLOS SANTANA

Friends include angels, dead trumpeters

CASE HISTORY A big fan of hallucinogens as a young man, Afro-Cuban fusion pioneer Santana dropped acid at Woodstock and played his guitar as though he believed it to be a snake. He embraced a less chemical spirituality after picking up a New Age book at the Milwaukee airport in 1988. Six years later, he claimed to be guided by an angel named Metatron, who looked a bit like Santa Claus. Credits Metatron with letting him know that 1999's *Supernatural* was going to be a massive hit; claims that the late Miles Davis talks to him.

CRAZIEST MOMENT Santana recorded 1972's *Carlos Santana and Buddy Miles: Live!* in Hawaii's Diamond Head volcanic crater.

37

ARTHUR LEE

Chemically enhanced Love frontman and jailbird

CASE HISTORY In 1968, Lee's band, Love, ingested a steady diet of grass, acid and heroin to make the apocalyptic masterpiece *Forever Changes.* Lee dropped out of sight in the '80s amid rumors of addiction and homelessness, and spent two years in jail after violating probation on an arson charge. In 1996, he was sentenced to 12 years in prison for firing a gun while arguing with a neighbor; he was released — after serving five years — on a technicality.

CRAZIEST MOMENT While in prison, Lee found God, and later got Love back together on His orders.

36

ELVIS PRESLEY

Guns and pills? *Thankyewverymuch!*

CASE HISTORY Presley had used amphetamines since his army days, but from his 1973 divorce until his death, his drug-taking reached epic levels. His personal physician, Dr. George Nichopolous, prescribed 19,000 doses of pills in his last two years alone. Sleeping days and working nights, he became paranoid and clinically depressed: firing revolvers into walls, handing out diamond watches to near-strangers and using his private jet for cross-country sandwich runs.

CRAZIEST MOMENT Phoning President Jimmy Carter just weeks before his death, a whacked-out Presley complained he was being "shadowed" by "sinister forces."

Deep in cocaine psychosis, David Bowie was convinced Satan was living in his swimming pool.

35

IAN CURTIS

Much-troubled Joy Division leader

CASE HISTORY The tortured soul of England's Joy Division, Curtis suffered from grand mal epilepsy, the medication for which can have grave affects on the sufferer's mental and physical state. By 1978, he was having epileptic seizures and blackouts onstage. In April 1980, he attempted suicide, only to be pulled out of a hospital the next night to play a gig. But he could perform only two songs. The crowd rioted, and he suffered another breakdown.

CRAZIEST MOMENT On the eve of Joy Division's first American tour, Curtis, just 23, hanged himself in his kitchen.

HE'S SO CRAZY "At this moment I wish I were dead. I just can't cope anymore." — From Curtis's suicide note

34

LOU REED

Velvet Underground alumnus, full-time Mr. Rude

CASE HISTORY Perhaps less crazy than pathologically unpleasant and cantankerous. Reed's parents put him on a regimen of electroshock therapy because they thought he was gay. He simulated shooting up onstage, and in 1975 he released *Metal Machine Music,* four sides of unlistenable electronic noise — and talked it up in classical terms.

CRAZIEST MOMENT Recorded a song called "I Wanna Be Black," in which he expresses a desire to be assassinated like Martin Luther King "and have a big prick, too."

HE'S SO CRAZY "Some claim that I'm a terror, a dictator — and they're right."

Clockwise from top left: Redferns/Retna Ltd.; Paul Slattery/RetnaUK; Mick Rock/Star File; William Coupon/Corbis; Fougere Eric/Corbis

33

SINÉAD O'CONNOR

That's *Father* O'Connor to you

CASE HISTORY O'Connor's career lunacy was unparalleled: She declined four Grammy nominations, defended the Irish Republican Army and savaged both Bono and "The Star-Spangled Banner." A difficult childhood (reform school, violent nuns) should have earned her sympathy. But even becoming a priest (really) didn't make amends for ripping up a photo of the Pope on *Saturday Night Live*.

CRAZIEST MOMENT Declaring that the Roman Catholic Church was the fount of all evil. Then ordaining as a female priest for the Latin Tridentine Church, splinter group of . . . the Roman Catholic Church.

SHE'S SO CRAZY On her now long-dead fame: "It was the worst phase of my life, which I thank God I'll never have to go through again."

32

GEORGE CLINTON

Even more obsessed with sex than his presidential namesake

CASE HISTORY In the late '60s, Clinton created Parliament-Funkadelic, an acid-inspired cartoon world of characters such as Sir Nose and Mr. Wiggles the Worm — and they certainly loved their narcotics. Clinton managed to stay out of legal trouble until last December, when he was arrested after allegedly telling a police officer that he had cocaine in his pocket. He now plays with a new act called Drugs.

CRAZIEST MOMENT He used to jump out of a coffin and encourage other musicians to simulate sex onstage.

HE'S SO CRAZY "Bass was one thing that wasn't illegal on the radio, so we'd try to give you as much of it as we could. Bass was like a big dick."

31

LEE "SCRATCH" PERRY

A genius in the studio — when he isn't burning it down

CASE HISTORY Reggae's leading loon. For his freakishly inspired dub productions, Perry fired pistols and recorded crying babies and the sound of the weather outside. At his Black Ark studio in Jamaica, he was spotted walking backward, baptizing locals with a garden hose and worshiping bananas. In 1980, he burned the studio down.

CRAZIEST MOMENT Putting a curse on the British Broadcasting Corporation that he refuses to lift until it agrees to play his records around the clock.

30

ALEXANDER "SKIP" SPENCE

Moby Grape's mad axman

CASE HISTORY A founding member of both Jefferson Airplane and Moby Grape, Spence managed to create one solo masterpiece, 1969's *Oar*, before a combination of schizophrenia and drug abuse made him a little nutty. After drifting in and out of institutions his entire adult life, Spence died of lung cancer in 1999 while a ward of the state of California.

CRAZIEST MOMENT A bit antsy from a long day of shooting speed, Spence once went after Moby Grape drummer Don Stevenson with a fire ax.

29

RICK JAMES

Funk superfreak — and just plain old freak

CASE HISTORY A tireless advocate of marijuana use, James progressed to cocaine in the early '80s, estimating that he freebased $7,000 worth of cocaine a week for five years — $1.8 million total. James was jailed in 1994 for assault, false imprisonment and furnishing drugs after he and his girlfriend were accused of torturing two female crack buddies. James is currently clean and married; he now plays the stock market.

CRAZIEST MOMENT James once bought a leather jacket with black mink lining for $28,000 "out of ego," then realized that it was too small for him.

> Producer Lee "Scratch" Perry worshiped bananas and baptized people with a garden hose.

28

WENDY O. WILLIAMS

Car-exploding, clothes-hating punk legend

CASE HISTORY Williams, a stripper-turned-mohawked lead singer of the loud but tone-deaf Plasmatics, differentiated herself from the New York punk pack with ultra-violent onstage stunts such as cutting her band's equipment up with a chainsaw. Williams retired from punk to rehabilitate animals in Connecticut, and then unexpectedly shot herself in 1998.

CRAZIEST MOMENT Blowing up an explosives-packed Ford Pinto on Tom Snyder's talk show *Tomorrow* in 1981.

SHE'S SO CRAZY "I don't believe that people should take their own lives without deep and thoughtful reflection." — From Williams's suicide note

You So *Not* Crazy!

INSANELY NORMAL!

Not all pop stars are street-walking cheetahs with heads full of napalm. Some are rather, well, normal . . .

HUEY LEWIS

Hip to be square? Well, square, certainly: Following the success of his 1986 album, *Fore!*, Lewis celebrated by moving his family to a San Francisco suburb because "there are tons of kids in the neighborhood." To date, the golf-loving Lewis's *Behind the Music* is the only one to have a happy beginning, middle and end.

MANDY MOORE

Clean-cut singer-actress and teen idol. How clean-cut? When asked what "crazy adventures" she had in Venice while filming her recent movie *Chasing Liberty*, she 'fessed up to having "scoured" the city for peanut butter. *Craaaaaazy!*

RADIOHEAD

Their music may be out there, but the 'Head are, pretty much to a man, college-educated, crossword-loving family types. Bassist Colin Greenwood once unwisely revealed that instead of trashing hotel rooms, Radiohead actually tidy them up before checking out.

DIDO

Despite multi-multiplatinum album sales, Dido remains so anonymous that when she was recently introduced to someone at a party, the Brit chanteuse was asked if she spelled her name "like the singer." She can't drink Jack Daniel's, as she once got sick from overindulging: "I can't even look at the label!"

DAVID BOWIE (1990–PRESENT)

Once apparently doomed to an early grave, the former chemical dustbin and icon of sexual ambiguity is now largely doomed to spend his time in the company of his supermodel wife, Iman. He has even fixed his formerly "crazy" teeth. *CLARK COLLIS*

Huey Lewis: "So that's what was stuck in my ass!"

Clockwise from top left: AP Photo/Jim Cooper; Lynn Goldsmith/Corbis; Roger Ressmeyer/Corbis; Jay Blakesberg/Retna Ltd.

27

KEITH MOON

The craziest Nazi-impersonating percussionist ever!

CASE HISTORY The Who drummer's madness was determinedly antisocial, whether he was stuffing his drums with gunpowder on live TV, running naked around a bus filled with adolescent schoolgirls or parading through London's Jewish neighborhoods in a Nazi uniform. After a poignant final TV appearance in which he proved unable to destroy his drum kit, Moon succumbed to his lifelong drug and alcohol abuse in 1978, graciously dying before he got old.

CRAZIEST MOMENT Fresh from rehab, he celebrated on an airplane with a food fight, a screaming fit and an over-the-PA rendition of "The Lone Ranger."

HE'S SO CRAZY In a restaurant once with six prostitutes, Moon loudly announced to the room, "And now, the astounding Moonio will perform his world-famous multi-clitoral stimulation!"

26

IGGY POP

Could have become a golfer. Decided to become a nutjob

CASE HISTORY Born James Osterberg and raised in a Michigan trailer park, Pop formed the Stooges in 1967, lacerated and exposed himself onstage — and invented punk. In 1974, a squabble with Detroit bikers the Scorpions led Pop to threaten them on live radio; they turned up at that night's show and threw shovels at him. He once lived solely on German sausage for an entire year.

CRAZIEST MOMENT In 1975, Pop toyed with the idea of becoming a professional golfer, but admitted himself to a mental institution instead.

HE'S SO CRAZY "I'd sometimes wake up with bumps on my head, blood on my shirt and something green coming out of my penis."

25

JOHN FRUSCIANTE

Chilis guitarist who lost the plot — and his teeth

CASE HISTORY In 1992, the guitar prodigy bailed on the Red Hot Chili Peppers because the voices in his head were telling him to take heroin and cocaine — which he did, constantly, for the next six years, decamping to the Hollywood Hills and getting so wrecked that his teeth fell out. In 1998, he successfully completed rehab and rejoined the band.

CRAZIEST MOMENT In 1997, Frusciante recorded the solo album *Smile From the Streets You Hold* in large part because he needed drug money.

HE'S SO CRAZY "To me, music is the . . . voice of all the people who have lived and died. At least the ones that I'm connected to."

24

CAPTAIN BEEFHEART

He sang "Ice Cream for Crows." We have no idea why

CASE HISTORY Avant-garde blues shouter Beefheart was abrasive, tyrannical and possibly clinically mad. While recording 1969's *Trout Mask Replica,* he locked his Magic Band in a house for eight months; once a week someone was allowed out to fetch food. In the meantime, his musicians struggled to interpret the music he was "writing" on the piano, an instrument he couldn't actually play.

CRAZIEST MOMENT Giving the Magic Band new names to match the costumes he made them wear. His clarinet player, the Mascara Snake, quit shortly after.

23

G.G. ALLIN

His live show was, quite literally, shit

CASE HISTORY Named Jesus Christ by his father — "Je-Je" was his childhood nickname — the '80s' shock-punk stalwart built a career based on shows filled with nudity, defecation, mutilation, self-abuse and audience abuse. At one show, Allin attempted to have sex with a dead cat. A promiscuous man, he expressed disappointment when he tested negative for HIV, and he promised to commit suicide onstage. Instead, he died of a rather ordinary heroin overdose in 1993.

CRAZIEST MOMENT Allin was buried in a jockstrap embroidered with the phrase EAT ME.

22

JERRY LEE LEWIS

The Killer likes 'em young. And related to him

CASE HISTORY By the time he turned 21 in 1956, Lewis had been jailed, twice married (bigamously) and thrown out of Bible college. That year, he showcased his new 13-year-old bride (who was also his cousin) around Europe. A few short wives later, he had accidentally shot his bass player, lost two spouses and a son (to drowning, overdose and a Jeep wreck), was hospitalized with bleeding ulcers and had been bankrupted by the IRS.

CRAZIEST MOMENT Once, behind the wheel of his Rolls-Royce, he tried to get into Graceland to see Elvis Presley, was rejected, threw a champagne bottle through the car window without rolling it down first and then drove back to say hello again with his nose smashed.

Ike Turner estimates he spent $11 million on cocaine over 30 years. He has been married 13 times.

21

JULIAN COPE

Even his alien alter ego is saner than he is!

CASE HISTORY One of English pop's finest singer-songwriters, Cope is also a pagan who eulogized the Norse god Odin and refuses to delineate time into BC and AD. In the '80s, he lectured journalists on the benefits of hallucinogens, lived on a traffic island and, rumors say, sold his songs to visitors at Paul McCartney's trout farm. Recently, he spent eight years writing *The Modern Antiquarian,* an exhaustive — and well-received — appraisal of Britain's prehistoric landmarks.

CRAZIEST MOMENT In 1990, he joined protesters in an anti-poll tax demonstration in England dressed as Mr. Sqwubbsy, a seven-foot-tall alien.

HE'S SO CRAZY "We went out driving to the mushroom field the other day, picked a load and carried the car home."

BLEW MILLIONS ON COCAINE!

20

IKE TURNER

Oft-high, oft-married, oft-wife-beating soul maverick

CASE HISTORY Turner's father was murdered by a racist mob when Ike was 4; a violent stepfather set a pattern Ike would grow to imitate. He bigamously married Tina Turner and totally controlled her life for 10 years. Before she left him in 1976, he had hit her, poured hot coffee on her face, burned her lips with cigarettes and made her perform while sick and pregnant. Turner estimates he spent $11 million on cocaine over 30 years. He has been married at least 13 times.

CRAZIEST MOMENT Used to spend $36,000 a day filling champagne buckets with cocaine and letting visitors to his Los Angeles home help themselves.

HE'S SO CRAZY "I did a lot of wrong things, but I don't think I'm a bad person."

Clockwise from top left: Shepard Sherbell/Corbis; Andrew Brusso/Corbis Outline; Michael Ochs Archives.com; Anthony Saint James/Retna Ltd.; Neal Preston/Corbis

19

DANIEL JOHNSTON

Totally sane singer-songwriter . . . when he remembers his medication

CASE HISTORY When he stays on his meds, singer-songwriter Johnston warbles sweet off-key pop songs backed by piano or acoustic guitar. When he goes off them, the pudgy Texan is prone to erratic behavior. In 1986, he was tossed in jail for attacking a friend with a lead pipe; *Hi, How Are You?*, the self-produced tape that made him famous, was recorded during a full-blown nervous breakdown.

CRAZIEST MOMENT On a plane in 1990, Johnston freaked out and grabbed the controls, convinced that his father, who was piloting it at the time, was — guess who? — Satan.

HE'S SO CRAZY "A lot of my other selves walked out of my body and did a lot of things I was surprised at."

18

LIZA MINNELLI

Gay icon, queer marriage

CASE HISTORY The daughter of pill-popping icon Judy Garland has herself spent a fair share of time in the valley of the dolls. She recently tickled the tabloids with an impressive spurt of bizarre episodes, notably her wedding to latex-faced David Gest. The show-stopper was Gest's $10 million lawsuit against Minnelli that ended their marriage — during which, he claims, she maintained sobriety only long enough to beat him.

CRAZIEST MOMENT Performing onstage in 1978, Minnelli spotted Marlene Dietrich in the audience. She bent to kiss Dietrich's hand, realized the woman was a Dietrich look-alike, panicked and got "Marlene's" finger stuck up her nose.

SHE'S SO CRAZY "I, Liza Minnelli, take thee, David Gest . . ."

17

JIM GORDON

Wrote "Layla." Killed mother

CASE HISTORY Gordon was a session drummer who cowrote "Layla" with Eric Clapton — and was schizophrenic to boot. Voices in his head commanded him to eat just one mouthful of food each meal; he cracked his second wife's ribs for bringing evil spirits into the house. In June 1983, Gordon killed his mother by hitting her with a hammer and stabbing her, and was sentenced to 16 years to life for second-degree murder.

CRAZIEST MOMENT Recording with Johnny Rivers in 1977, Gordon glared at guitarist Dean Parks. "You're messing with my time," Gordon said. "You're moving my hands. I want you to stop it."

16

SUN RA

Where did the jazz maestro learn to play piano? Saturn!

CASE HISTORY The former Herman Blount and his Arkestra were major influences in free jazz. Ra claims to have received messages from "unknown forces" when he was 3, leading him to work with "the dark things of the cosmos which are beyond black." Ra taught a class at the University of California at Berkeley whose reading list included several books that apparently didn't exist. He once visited the United Nations demanding to speak to the person in charge.

CRAZIEST MOMENT Claimed to be from the planet Saturn.

15

ROKY ERICKSON

Psychedelic icon who gets sent songs by dead people

CASE HISTORY The founder of one of the first American psychedelic bands, the Thirteenth Floor Elevators. Busted for possession of six joints in 1969, Erickson pled insanity rather than serve jail time and was placed in the Rusk State Hospital for the Criminally Insane in Austin, Texas, for three and a half years. It was there, feasting on a steady diet of electroshock therapy and Thorazine, that the schizophrenic Erickson wrote a book of poetry and formed a band with fellow inmates. In the late '90s, he lived in a federally subsidized house in Texas, with radios and TVs on at all times to drown out the voices.

CRAZIEST MOMENT Signed an affidavit in 1982 declaring that a Martian had taken over his body.

Killing Joke's Jaz Coleman has conducted interviews entirely in his own made-up language.

14

JAZ COLEMAN

The Killing Joke frontman fears the apocalypse. We fear him

CASE HISTORY The Killing Joke frontman fled to Iceland in 1982 in fear of the apocalypse, but merely ended up working with the Sugarcubes before returning to England. Coleman has conducted interviews entirely in his own made-up language and once taped a journalist's mouth shut for asking silly questions. He's also composer-in-residence for the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, whose conductor hails him as "the new Mahler."

CRAZIEST MOMENT Coleman bribed the Egyptian Minister of Culture to allow Killing Joke to record part of their *Pandemonium* album in the Great Pyramid.

HE'S SO CRAZY "I'm a dangerous man. Fuck off."

13

COURTNEY LOVE

Without her, *Crazy Pop Star Monthly* would be a much quicker read

CASE HISTORY Dementia is Love's old friend, from her snorting heroin at the site of Nancy Spungen's death to marrying Kurt Cobain while wearing lobotomized actress Frances Farmer's clothes. Her recent drug binge (and attendant outbursts) led to the loss of custody of her and Cobain's only child, Frances Bean. Her Web postings, indecipherable on good days, now veer toward gibberish.

CRAZIEST MOMENT Recently OD'd, called paramedics and then invited her daughter to share the special mother-and-child moment.

SHE'S SO CRAZY On her pending drug charges: "[The situation is] retarded. . . . I didn't even shoplift!"

12

KEVIN ROWLAND

Hello, dresses. Goodbye, career

CASE HISTORY Rowland was the uncompromising Dexys Midnight Runners frontman who banned booze and drugs and insisted that the band get up early in the morning to go jogging. In 1991, he declared himself bankrupt and spent his days bedridden, snorting cocaine under his sheets, before briefly joining a religious cult. In 1999, he reemerged with a new image, which usually included wearing a dress and white panties.

CRAZIEST MOMENT Rowland stole the master tapes to Dexys' debut album to get a better deal with the band's label. When the producer threw himself in front of the getaway van, Rowland urged the driver, "Accelerate, and damn the consequences!"

HE'S SO CRAZY "To me, it makes perfect sense to wear a dress."

Clockwise from top left: Sylvia Farago/RetnaUK; LMN/Rex Features; Frazer Harrison/Getty/Newscom.com; Tony Buckingham/Redferns/Retna Ltd.; Ruven Afanador/Corbis Outline

Adam Ant: "Who's been playing tic-tac-toe on my face?"

11

ADAM ANT

There's nothing "new" or "romantic" about waving a gun around, mister

CASE HISTORY The New Romantic leading light has suffered lifelong bouts of depression. He attempted suicide when he was 21. In January 2002, when drinkers in a London pub laughed at his cowboy hat, Ant snapped. He left the premises in a huff, returning later to throw a car alternator through the window and wave a fake revolver around. Was subsequently confined to a mental hospital.

CRAZIEST MOMENT When Adam and the Ants played London in 1981, Ant insisted that roadies sprinkle every seat in the theater with lavender water, because that's what the Georgians did.

HE'S SO CRAZY "They're just out to get me. I'm not mad."

10

OZZY OSBOURNE

Like your cuddly uncle — if your cuddly uncle bites the head off bats

CASE HISTORY Having helped invent heavy metal with Black Sabbath, Ozzy has worked long and hard for his "prince of fucking darkness" moniker. His exploits include biting the heads off doves and bats, urinating on the Alamo in San Antonio and, when checking into the Betty Ford Clinic, asking for directions to the bar. He also reportedly wanted to open his Live Aid set with a song called "Food Glorious Food."

CRAZIEST MOMENT After a five-day drinking binge in 1989, Osbourne says that voices ordered him to kill his wife, Sharon. He tried to strangle her, saying, "We've decided you've got to go."

HE'S SO CRAZY "Of all the things I've lost, I miss my mind the most."

9

OL' DIRTY BASTARD

Ol' Dirty Bastard by name. Complete lunatic by nature

CASE HISTORY The Wu-Tang Clan's loose cannon. He bum-rushed the 1998 Grammys, grabbing the mic from Shawn Colvin to announce that "Wu-Tang is for the children." In 1999, when he was caught with 20 bags of crack, he asked police to make them "disappear." In November 2000, he was apprehended while waiting at a McDonald's drive-through and packed off to jail on cocaine-possession charges.

CRAZIEST MOMENT On trial for drug offenses in January 2000, he called the female district attorney a "sperm donor."

HE'S SO CRAZY "Remember the Indian who sold Manhattan to the white man? That's my great-great-grandfather."

8

EURONYMOUS

Human-brain-eating Norwegian death-metaller

CASE HISTORY A big noise in Norway's church-burning black-metal scene, Oystien Aarseth changed his name to Euronymous as his band, Mayhem, emerged in the mid-'80s. After bandmate Per Yngve Ohlin — whose nickname was "Dead" — killed himself with a shotgun, Euronymous found the body; before calling police, he picked up a camera and took some postmortem photos. In 1993, following a spat with fellow metaller Varg "Count Grishnackh" Vikernes, Euronymous was stabbed more than 25 times. "I piss on his grave," said the count before being sentenced to 21 years in prison for the murder.

CRAZIEST MOMENT Euronymous ate a piece of Dead's brain and used pieces of the skull as jewelry.

7

SYD BARRETT

Acid-fried Pink Floyd legend

CASE HISTORY Barrett was central to the original Pink Floyd lineup, but he hated fame, and a diet of double-dipped LSD sugar cubes helped give him a nervous breakdown. Burned out, he forgot the words *and* the music while playing the British TV show *Top of the Pops*; later, tripping again, Barrett repeated the same chord throughout his final Floyd gig. He has spent the last 34 years as a recluse, gardening in rural England.

CRAZIEST MOMENT He once appeared onstage with Mandrax pills crushed into Brylcreem he had put in his hair.

6

PETER GREEN

Voices-hearing Fleetwood Mac guitar virtuoso

CASE HISTORY Fleetwood Mac's founding member was one of the greatest blues guitarists ever. But after binging on acid, he tried to persuade his bandmates to donate their earnings to charity. He quit in 1970. He grew his fingernails extraordinarily long so he wouldn't have to play guitar again. He then spent 25 years being subjected to electroshock therapy and taking heavy psychiatric drugs that made him sleep 20 hours a day.

CRAZIEST MOMENT Was arrested in 1977 after threatening manager Clifford Davis with a rifle; Davis had been trying to deliver a $50,000 royalty check to his London home.

When checking into the Betty Ford Clinic, Ozzy Osbourne asked for directions to the bar.

GUN-TOTING FUNK ICON

5

SLY STONE

The maddest funkateer on Earth, and elsewhere, too

CASE HISTORY Sylvester Stewart practically invented funk, but his dazzling highs were followed by an endless, cocaine-induced low. Even in 1971, his sex-and-drugs regimen was so intense that his label had to tempt him with $1 million in cash to complete an album. Stone once flew to London from Rotterdam 10 minutes before a concert, claiming he was going shopping and would be back in time for the show. Futile bouts of rehab came at the end of the '70s; by then, Stone had taken to carrying a gun.

CRAZIEST MOMENT While making *There's a Riot Going On*, he made Bobby Womack play for six days without sleep.

HE'S SO CRAZY George Clinton has said of him, "Sly has done so much that he'll never fully land on Planet Earth again."

4

WHITNEY HOUSTON

Makes Bobby Brown look like the sane one

CASE HISTORY Even Houston's drug-gobbling hubby, Bobby Brown, must look at her and think, "Now *she's* crazy." Long rumored to be suffering from cocaine and heroin addictions, she denied taking drugs even after she was booted from the 2000 Academy Awards for *playing an imaginary piano*. In 2001, after Houston was a no-show at the second night of Michael Jackson's thirtieth-anniversary gala, her publicist issued a statement denying that she had died.

CRAZIEST MOMENT Fleeing to Israel to claim honorary Jewishness.

SHE'S SO CRAZY "I make too much money to ever smoke crack."

Clockwise from top left: Lynn McAfee/Retna Ltd.; Robin Kaplan/LFI; Stringer/Israel/Reuters Photo Archive/Newscom.com; T. Eric Monroe/Retna Ltd.; LFI

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3

AXL ROSE

Deranged GN'R singer and topiary fan

CASE HISTORY Rose developed a loathing for authority as a child after his stepfather hit him for singing along to Barry Manilow's "Mandy." Despite achieving global rock hegemony with 1987's *Appetite for Destruction,* all was not well in this redneck intellectual's jungle: He claimed Courtney Love tried to possess him at 1993's MTV awards, and he's *still* working on the follow-up to GN'R's album of punk covers, *The Spaghetti Incident?,* which was released 10 years ago.

CRAZIEST MOMENT After marrying Erin Everly in 1990, Rose bought a house in the Hollywood Hills and had two topiary elephants delivered by helicopter. The couple never moved into the property.

HE'S SO CRAZY "I'm trying to have a happy life here — why do I keep getting in my own way with it? What's going on here?"

2

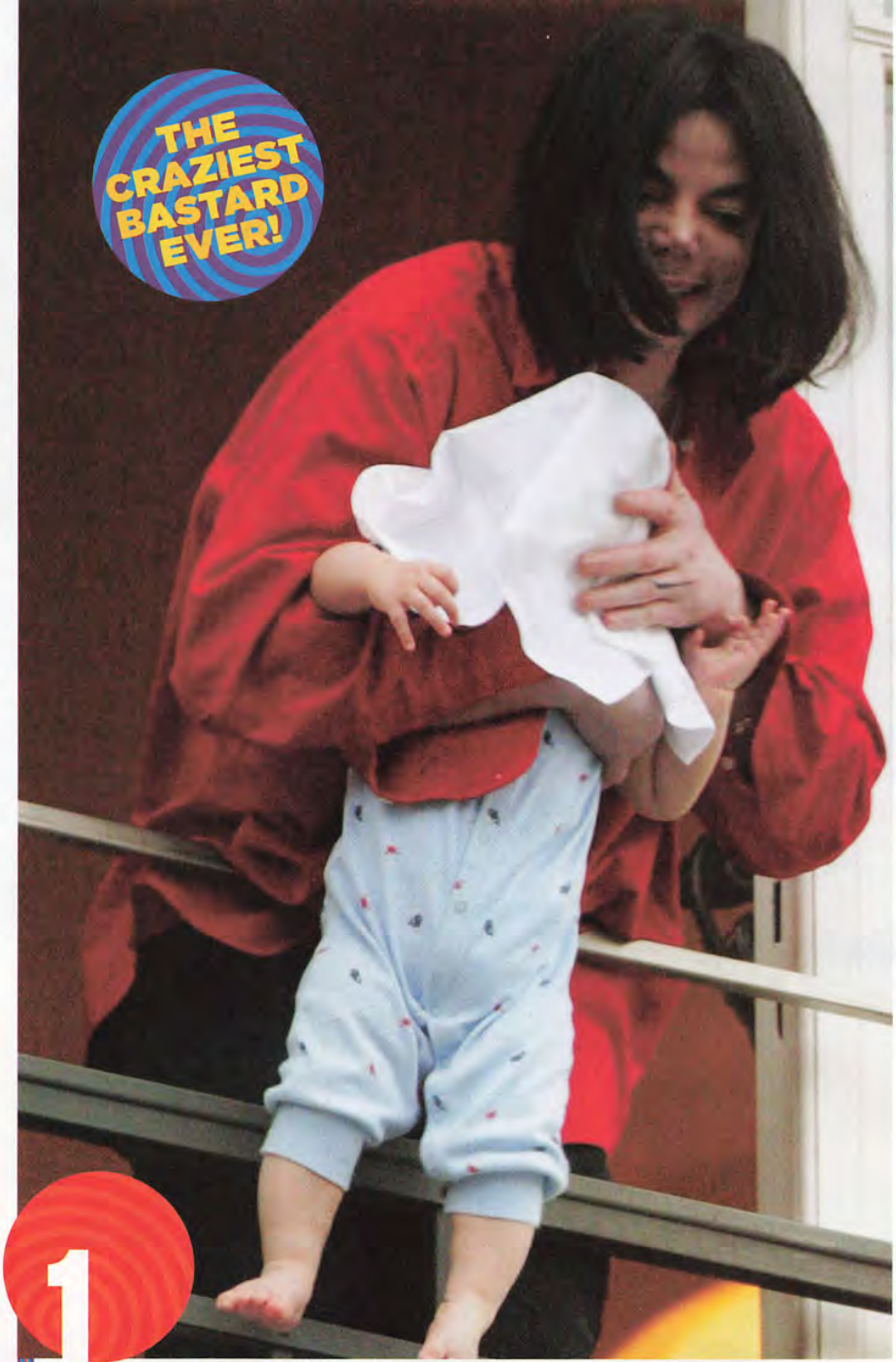
BRIAN WILSON

"Good Vibrations"? Was he being ironic?

CASE HISTORY In 1966, Wilson prepared for the Beach Boys' *Smile* sessions by packing $2,000 worth of hash, along with LSD and prescription amphetamines. He built a sandpit in his house, instructed his orchestra to wear toy fireman helmets — and *then* started hearing voices and feeling suicidal. After hospitalization, Wilson gorged on pills, steaks and cigarettes and ballooned to 300 pounds. Terrified of water, he stopped bathing. He spent three years in bed convinced that Phil Spector was coming to shoot him. Diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, manic depression and brain damage in the early '80s.

CRAZIEST MOMENT Meeting some youngsters backstage in 1970, Wilson introduced himself with "I'm Brian." "We know," one replied. "We're your children."

HE'S SO CRAZY "There are a myriad of drug songs on the pop-music market today," Wilson told the British music magazine *Melody Maker* in 1966. "I don't know which they are."


THE CRAZIEST BASTARD EVER!

1

MICHAEL JACKSON

Frankly, it would be easier to list the crazy things he *hasn't* done

Michael Jackson unsuccessfully auditions for *Mary Poppins 2.*

CASE HISTORY Remember those innocent years when Jackson was merely so mental that he lived in an amusement park with llamas, chimps and the Elephant Man's skeleton? The craziest thing is that the most ridiculous rumors turned out to be true — he *didn't* see anything wrong with pan-generational slumber parties; he *didn't* have a nose left, let alone money. What spectacular madness turns $750 million in assets into $180 million in debt, apart from, uh, trying to open an amusement park in Poland? For his lifetime of lunacy, Wacko Jacko is the undisputed skin-whitening, baby-dangling, statue-building, crotch-grabbing, kiddie-cuddling King of Pop.

CRAZIEST MOMENT He claims he fathered Aryan babies, and then named them Prince I and Prince II. He's outdone himself again!

HE'S SO CRAZY Children and men sleeping together? "What the world needs right now is more love."

Clockwise from top left: Kevin Mazur/LFI; Reuters NewMedia Inc./Corbis; Jim Ruymen/UPI Photo Service/Newscom.com (inset); Michael Ochs Archives.com

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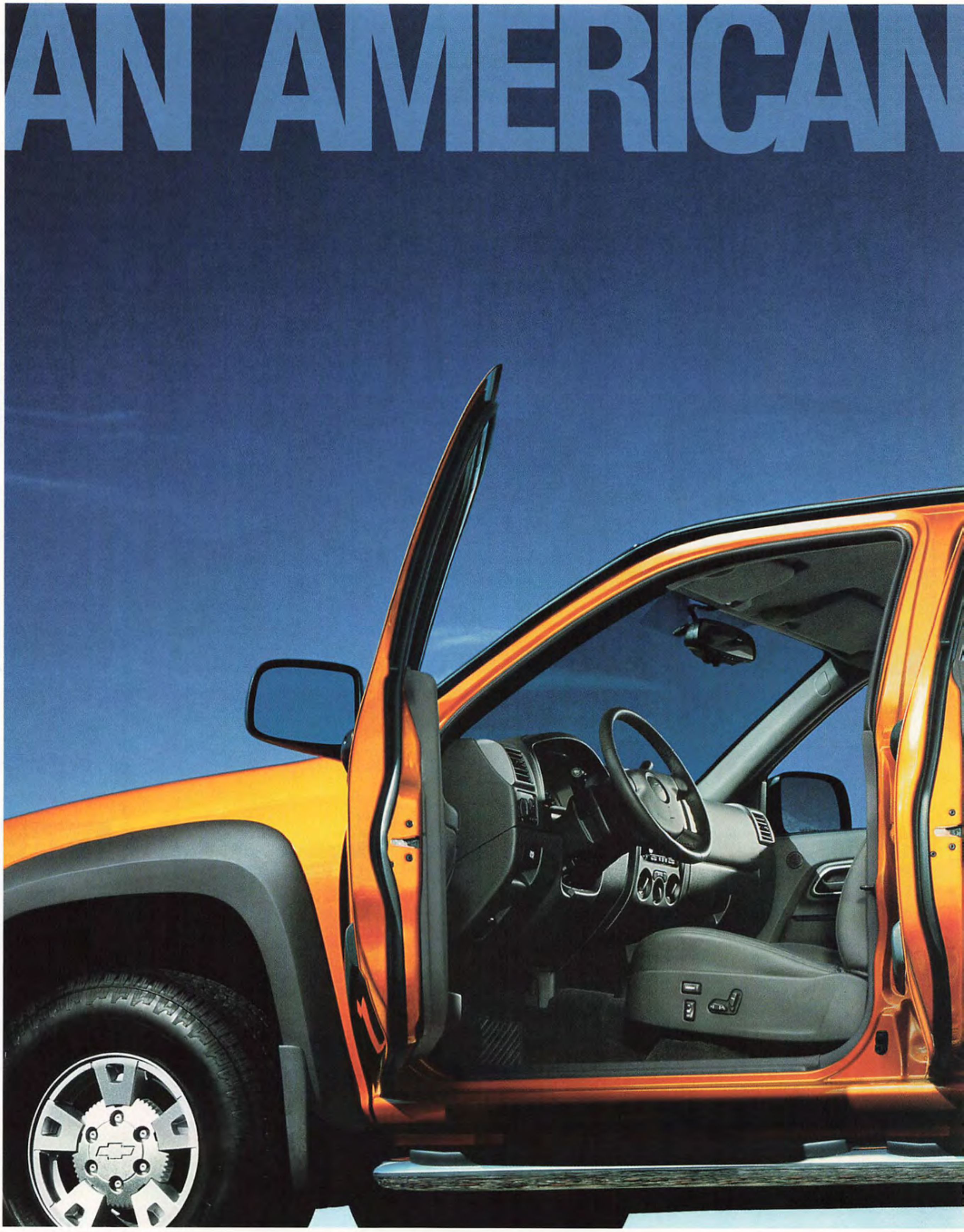
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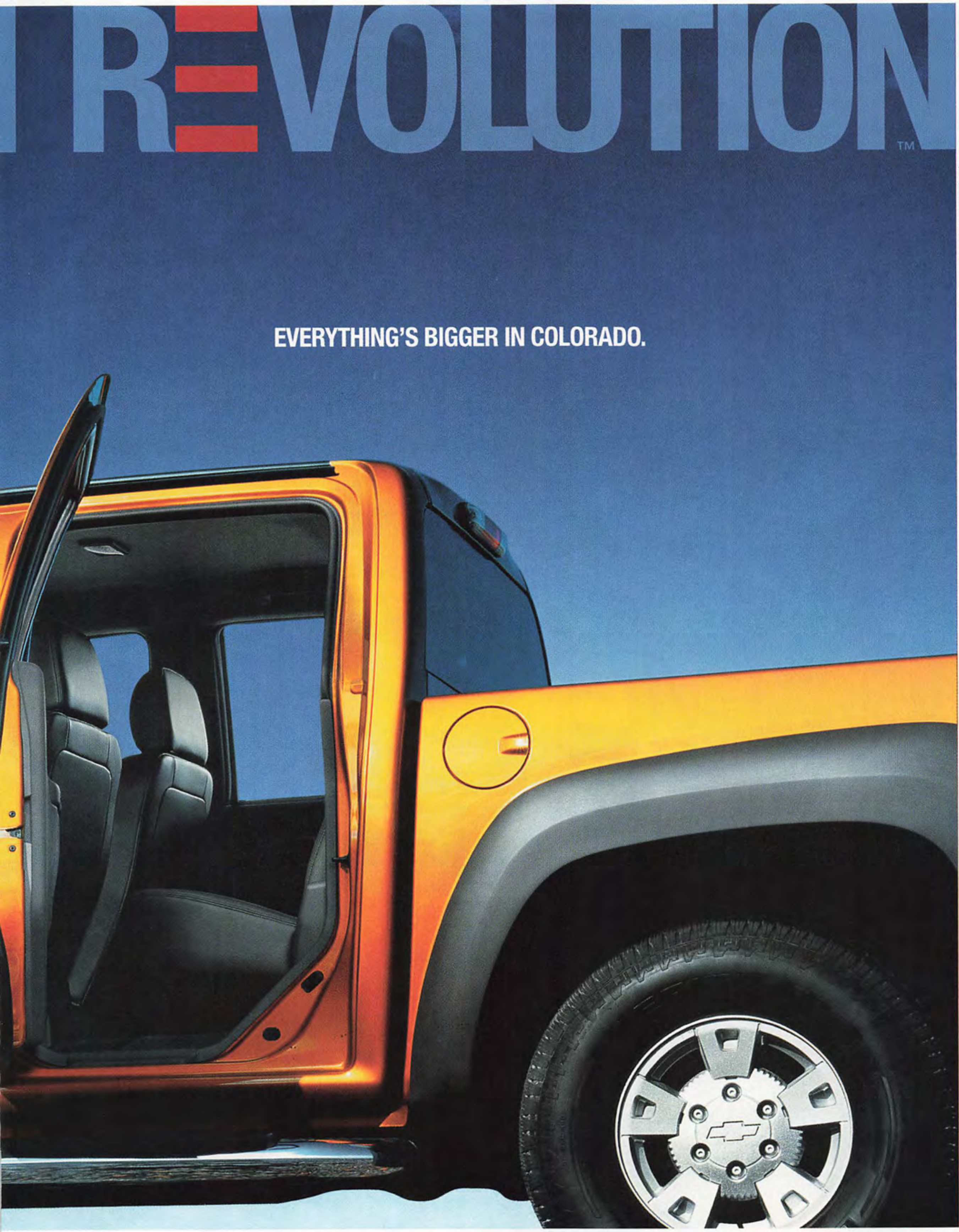
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THE LAST

SUPPER?

Even Grammy voters are right some of the time: **Outkast** are the greatest living hip-hop group. But don't count on them to make any more albums. *Blender* joins André 3000 and Big Boi on the catwalks and in the trattorias of Milan to learn what the future holds for rap's oddest couple

BY ROB TANNENBAUM
PHOTOGRAPHY BY F. SCOTT SCHAFER

From left: André 3000, burning plate of chicken wings, Big Boi

ON ANDRÉ 3000: JEANS BY **LEVI'S**; SHOES BY **PF FLYERS**. ON BIG BOI: JACKET AND SHIRT BY **EMPORIO ARMANI**

THE NIGHTCLUB IS called Hollywood, even though it's in Milan, Italy, because movies are as much a universal fantasy as sex and money. Tonight, the biggest star in Hollywood is André 3000.

It's fashion week, an annual January event when Milan fills with well-dressed, self-important shovers and anorexics, and Outkast have come as the personal guests of Giorgio Armani, who rules this hurried, mercenary city like the Pope (if the Pope wore tight black T-shirts and had a winter tan). A few flights down, the club's VIP lounge is full of hipsters and hiphopsters pressing to get closer to André. "In da Club" pushes the sound system, a comp bottle of champagne passes among André's posse, and a six-foot-tall blonde dances with one hand on a pole, wearing a high-cut Armani T-shirt and low-cut Armani jeans with — in case anyone misses the point — white Armani underwear poking out.

From the moment Dré arrives in the smoke-filled club, everyone wants to shake his hand or congratulate him, acting as though Outkast's hit "Hey Ya!" is the greatest song ever — which it may well be. All week long, he'll get free clothes, free dinners, free praise, a free hotel room, until it seems anything in the city is his for the asking. After less than 15 minutes, though, Dré starts to pack up. A local rapper asks knowingly whether he has "some bitches back at the hotel." No, Dré answers, wrinkling his nose in distaste. "I don't like cigarette smoke."

André Benjamin: rock star with allergies.

* * * * *

THE EMPORIO ARMANI fashion show the next night starts two hours late, a delay that only increases the degree of drinking and shoving inside Alcatraz, an industrialized disco. Finally, at 9:30, long-haired male models traipse a mirrored catwalk, seemingly impervious to the terrible techno music blasting, draped in fashions as expensive as they are unusual (apparently, Mr. Armani thinks men are ready to wear shoulder wraps over their suits). After 15 minutes, it's suddenly over, and after a riot of photo flashes and more shoving, Outkast move from the front row to the street.

One of these men is eccentric. Can you guess which?

André's bandmate, Big Boi, who will spend three days in Milan without sleeping, is out in the cold, content except for one longing: weed. "I wish I had some bud," he sighs. He even checks with *Blender* to see if we're holding. Cars stop, creating traffic madness along the road, and as passengers congratulate Big, he takes decisive action. "Who's smokin' that shit?" he demands loudly of anyone who passes. "I'm-a ask you like a nigga from Atlanta — who's smokin' that shit?"

* * * * *

BEFORE THEY WERE André 3000 and Big Boi, André Benjamin and Antwan Patton met in Atlanta as 15-year-old outcasts who lived in black neighborhoods but dressed like white preps. They listened to conscious rap by De La Soul and A Tribe Called Quest when classmates preferred gangsta N.W.A and Ice Cube. André was the wild one, always high. ("He taught *me* to roll a blunt," Big Boi marvels.) Then André stopped smoking, quit drinking, went vegan — hell, he even refuses a piece of gum from *Blender* because it creates digestive acids that hurt your stomach — and sprouted eccentricities including a peacock wardrobe so outrageous, his cousin told him the 'hood thought he was gay.

Where André, a slim Southern gentleman, is quiet, contained, elusive, anxious and feline, the compact Big Boi is emphatic, driven, intense and lion-like. Both are 28 now, and adult changes have left them with differing views of their bond. "I would die for him," Big Boi says.

Set design: Antonio Ballatore for Celestineagency.com; styling: Scott Free for The Rex Agency; grooming: Frederick Parnell for Solo Artists

"It's just that serious." Dré, more a loner, says, "If we weren't doing music, I don't know if we would still be friends."

Starting with *Southernplayalisticadillacmuzik* in 1994, every Outkast record has sold better than the one before, a remarkable streak, and last year's split CD, *Speakerboxxx/The Love Below,* boosted them to superstardom, with sales of 8 million and seven weeks at number 1. For consistency, daring, durability and crazy inspiration, Outkast are the greatest living hip-hop group. "Hey Ya!", which André wrote and produced, has even transcended the pop charts to become a cultural meme, a universal force, a new addition to the table of the elements: It has inspired parody videos on the Web featuring Saddam Hussein and Charlie Brown, and a flurry of live covers by rock bands. Right this second, "Hey Ya!" is playing at a wedding or a bar mitzvah.

Presidential candidate Wesley Clark dropped the duo's name in a TV ad last fall, declaring "I don't think Outkast are really breaking up" in a bid to impress young voters. Outkast are the rap stars even whitey can love; it's impossible to imagine any politician favorably mentioning 50 Cent or Eminem.

Bad timing, then, because André, restless and wary of feeling trapped, has lost interest in rap — he won't tour, because he doesn't want to do the old songs. Instead, he wants to play jazz and make movies. "I'm starting a new group," he tells *Blender*. Where Big Boi insists that Outkast are not breaking up, André is noncommittal. Unless Big Boi can change André's mind, Wesley Clark's prediction may prove incorrect.

"If we weren't doing music, I don't know if we would still be friends."
ANDRÉ, ON BIG BOI

André: "In a perfect world, this would be the last Outkast record."

Big Boi: " 'The last Outkast record'? He don't say that shit to me!"

* * * * *

ANDRÉ BENJAMIN HAS a sheepish confession: He was a skateboarder. After graduating from high school, he admits, he wrote "Skate or die" when signing classmates' yearbooks. Even then, André was trying to change identities.

"Like most of the rap stories you hear, we lived in the projects," he says. We're sitting in the extravagant Art Nouveau lobby of his Milan hotel as a cocktail-hour pianist plays show tunes. A small child stops by the table, transfixed by André's brushy hair. "Kids look at me crazy," he says, smiling broadly.

André was raised by a single mother, described by his friends as "no-nonsense," and for a while the pair lived in a Motel 6. But Sharon Benjamin-Hodo had a steady job working the assembly line at General Motors, and bought a house in an Atlanta subdivision. André was the first kid in his 'hood with a computer. He was bused to a white school, which created both opportunity and embarrassment: "I didn't want anybody to know where I lived, 'cause they were all rich. So I would get dropped off two miles away and walk home."

A self-described "mama's boy," he came to resent his mother's rules, so at 15, he was sent to live with his father to instill some discipline. "That was the biggest mistake ever," he says, chuckling. His bachelor father, who worked in collections, enforced no rules. "That's when I got into all kinds of trouble — stealing cars, robbing the pizza man. We'd find an empty apartment, order three pizzas, then meet the delivery guy and tell him, 'Drop it like it's hot.' That was fun."

One of his fellow car thieves knew →

Big Boi (left) and André, 1995

Big Boi will go to any length to get a handicapped-parking spot.

Antwan Patton, who began rapping in the tenth grade (his first rhyme: an antidrug rap), and he too lived in a Motel 6, for a whole year, with his two younger siblings and single mother. "We used to live off bologna sandwiches from a cooler," Big Boi says. "I've been to the lowest low. Drugs and alcohol, domestic abuse — crazy shit."

Who in his family had a substance problem? "Shit, who didn't?" he laughs. "Pops, Grandma, uncles, aunts. I smoke a little bud, but I know my limitations." His dad was abusive to Big Boi's mom "while he had the chance to be. Then my mom was like, 'Fuck this shit.' " But, Big adds, his mom was bedside last year when his father died after a failed kidney transplant. "Smashed me, man. Smashed me," he says softly.

> " 'The last Outkast record'? He don't say that shit to me!"
> **BIG BOI**

At the start of the group, André dominated. "I don't know if I'm supposed to be saying this," says Cee-Lo, the Georgia rapper who has known André since the third grade, "but in the beginning, Dré was writing all the material for himself and for Big."

"They were always a bit standoffish and very shy," adds LA Reid, the former president and CEO of Arista Records, who signed the duo to their record deal.

Outkast's 'hood-simple first single, "Player's Ball," topped rap charts and described "black-man heaven" as a land of big cars, pistols, gin and juice, ho's, bitches and so on. Their first tour was with 95 South and Quad City DJs, short-lived booty bandits, and there was no reason to think Outkast would be an exceptional group.

"I'd wake up smoking, go to sleep smoking, smoke all during the day," André says, recalling that tour. "I had some of the best times when I was high. I never worried about anything; now, I worry about every little thing." He was once so footloose that a friend dubbed him "Freddie Floater" — now, he says, his anxieties give him insomnia.

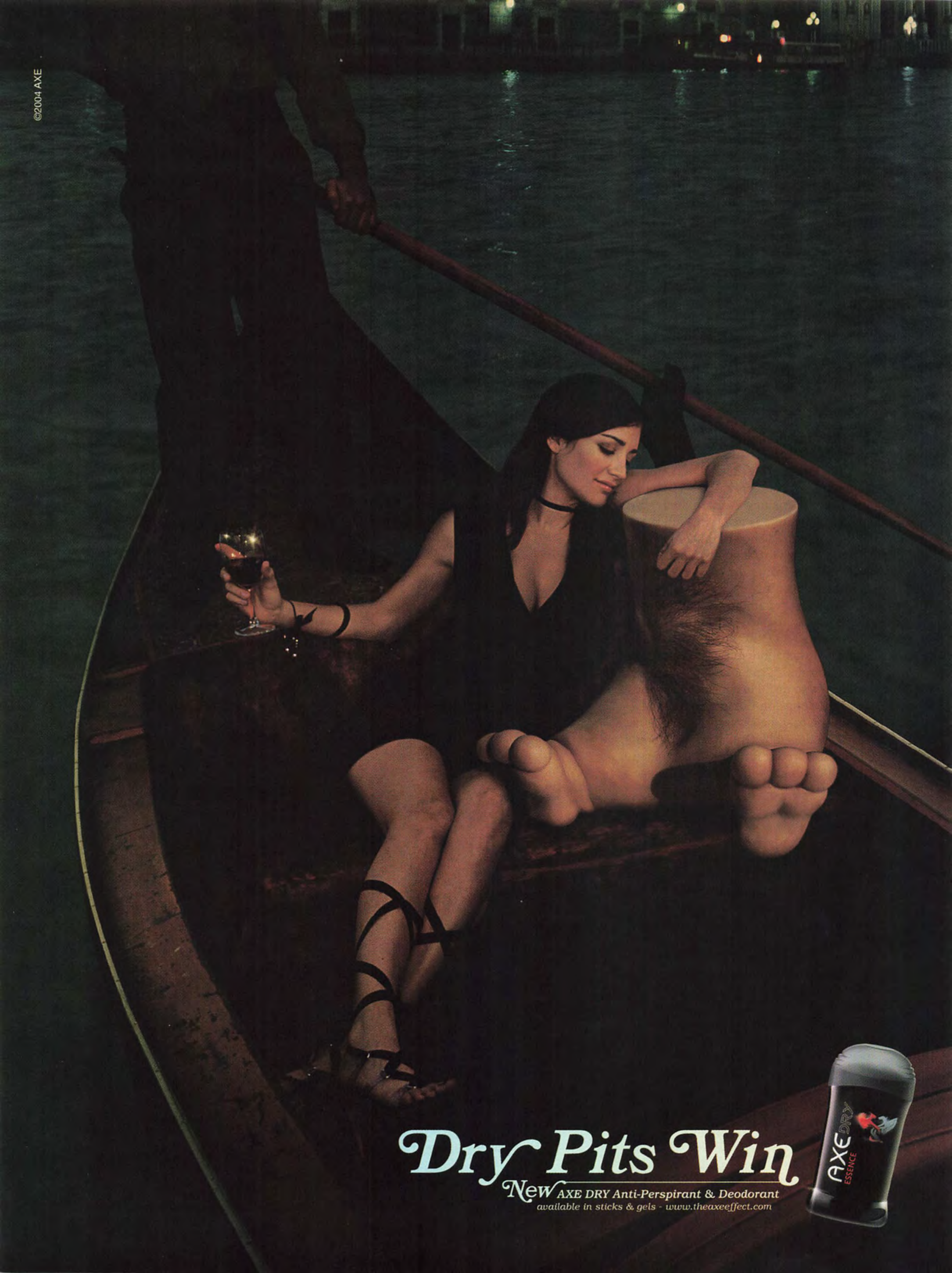
With Giorgio Armani in Milan, 2004

Their third album, 1998's *Aquemini,* was a revelation. The lyrics turned more personal and distinct, and the beats slowed into humid Southern funk. The unprecedented title song, a word created by combining André and Big's astrological signs, pledged lifelong love and togetherness between the two rappers "until they close the curtain."

"We didn't have blinders on — we listened to every type of music," Big says. André dramatized the band's emergence by turning into music's wildest dandy, trading between fluorescent futurism and retro glamour, unisex robes and country-club cardigans, looking one day like Superfly on Mars, the next like Mr. Rogers's accountant. These changes upset some Arista executives, who beseeched Big to stop André. "It wasn't what normal rappers do," André shrugs. "They say I'm this crazy dude, always in Buddha position. I'm a regular dude. I like to fuck girls, I like to curse — but I also like to dress cool."

Next, 2000's generous and comprehensive *Stankonia* "blew away every barrier," Big Boi adds accurately. "Bombs Over Baghdad" drops raging guitars while dissing other rappers; "Gasoline Dreams" questions the American dream; and the alternately angry and apologetic "Ms. Jackson" rose to a number 1 pop single, prompting an envious Vines cover. "Black people don't like loud guitars," André muses. "That drives me crazy. I've been wanting to turn it up for years." ➔

Clockwise from top left: Ernie Paniccioli/Retna Ltd.; F. Scott Schafer; courtesy of Armani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"We came in the door as a hip-hop group, but it's exceeded hip-hop: We are hip-hop, reggae, jazz, blues, soul, funk, everything," Big says. The evolution only expanded their audience. "You might see a 50-year-old father with his 21-year-old son. It's everybody: young, old, black, white, blind, crippled, crazy, whatever. Our tours are like some Woodstock shit."

Then came the day when Outkast met with their manager and Arista Records to discuss the group's next album, and André — who was spending lots of time in Hollywood — announced that he was working on a solo record, which he wanted to turn into a film. "It was a shock to me," Big Boi says, shaking his head.

* * * * *

BIG BOI IS relaxing in his hotel suite, sipping a Hennessy-and-Coke, his iPod rotating among Kate Bush, Oran "Juice" Jones and (of course) Outkast. He rolls up the sleeve of his new Armani dress shirt, one of many he was given this afternoon at the company's showroom, and displays a tattoo of the Outkast crown logo on his forearm. It signifies, he says, that Outkast is in his veins.

When André announced his plans, Big Boi explains, Arista was adamant: The label wanted an Outkast album, not a solo album. "I was a little bit pissed off," André admits. "I'm looking for something new to do." He considered giving away the songs on the Internet.

In the past, he says, some credits have read "Produced by Outkast," even though "I actually produced those songs. Financially, I don't know if that's cool," since a shared credit means a shared royalty.

Big Boi — who says he took over management of Outkast's label and clothing company when André lost interest in both — felt abandoned by his partner. "What do you expect me to do, being that Outkast is my heart, what I put my whole life into? Am I supposed to sit on the sideline and cheer? That's a lot of shit. But Dré's selfish; he's an only child." Though Big's tone is somewhere between peeved and annoyed, and he keeps returning to the question of why André would break up the band, he insists that "I wasn't angry; I was just frustrated."

So Big, who calls himself a "team player," kept working on songs he thought could be Outkast tracks. Arista →

> "It's exceeded hip-hop: We're hip-hop, reggae, jazz, blues, soul, funk, everything."
> **BIG BOI**

BURN, BABY, BURN! >>>

Your 10-part guide to Outkast's greatest terpsichorean treats of all time

BLENDER
OUTKAST
GREATEST HITS

1 "MYINTROTOLETUKNOW"
SOUTHERNPLAYALISTICADILLACMUZIK
LaFACE/ARISTA, 1994

While hip-hop enjoyed a Northeast renaissance, two 19-year-old Southerners were stirring guitar feedback and sonorous slang into this mission statement. The opener on their debut album, it sprung them into life fully formed.

BEST MOMENT Big Boi drawls, "Rent was due on the first day of the month, so I'm hustlin'." (0:37)

2 "B.O.B."
STANKONIA
LaFACE/ARISTA, 2000

Outkast don't flirt with dance music here — they force it into a 400-bpm gang-bang with gospel, electro and ridiculous guitar solos. The lyrics race from the Gulf War to silverback orangutans, AIDS paranoia to Taco Bell. Insane.

BEST MOMENT The beat drops out, spotlighting Big Boi and a churning drum machine. (1:21)

3 "HEY YA!"
SPEAKERBOXXX/THE LOVE BELOW
ARISTA, 2003

So catchy, it drove their fifth album to a number 1 pop debut; so fantastically happy, Valium- and Paxil-poppers everywhere forgot to refill their prescriptions. All gleaming teeth, twinkling eyes and clapping hands, it's the centerpiece of André 3000's concept disc.

BEST MOMENT Dré ecstatically repeats "All-right-all-right-all-right!" (2:24)

4 "GHETTO MUSICK"
SPEAKERBOXXX/THE LOVE BELOW
ARISTA, 2003

Big Boi breaks out his glow sticks and his love oils, rapping over a house beat one second, dropping into an 808 bathtub with Patti LaBelle's "I Just Want You to Know" the next.

BEST MOMENT Multi-tracked Big Boi urgently spells out the song's title. (0:46)

5 "ROSA PARKS"
AQUEMINI
LaFACE/ARISTA, 1998

Bubba Sparxxx's barnyard-hop owes everything to the bluegrass licks, harmonica trills, syrup-slow drawls and tongue-twisters strung together here. More about bragging rights than civil rights, the song's chorus is still being wrestled over in court.

BEST MOMENT The 30-second harmonica breakdown. (2:27)

6 "ELEVATORS (ME AND YOU)"
ATLIENS
LaFACE/ARISTA, 1996

Bass-heavy and melody-free, this minimalist single from their second album is spacious, slow, spooky, stoned — you might miss that it's a celebration of their growing success.

BEST MOMENT Dré raps, "We done come a long way like them Slim-ass cigarettes/From Virginia/This ain't gon' stop, so we jus' gon' continue." (3:18)

7 "FLIP FLOP ROCK"
FEAT. KILLER MIKE AND JAY-Z
SPEAKERBOXXX/THE LOVE BELOW
LaFACE/ARISTA, 2003

Jay-Z visits Atlanta, where the speed limit is 120 mph — over quivering guitar chords and jittery breakbeats, verses fly by in hyperspeed.

BEST MOMENT Jay-Z's shout-out to "public housing." (0:12)

8 "MS. JACKSON"
STANKONIA
LaFACE/ARISTA, 2000

On this Grammy winner, they paint a breakup's wild complexities in just three verses: Big Boi's pissed about custody battles, magnanimous about child support, glib about sexing up a divorcée; Dré — writing about his ex Erykah Badu — is plaintive and regretful.

BEST MOMENT Dré's voice lilts, asking "For*ever* ever?" (2:07)

9 "THE WHOLE WORLD"
FEAT. KILLER MIKE
BIG BOI AND DRÉ PRESENT . . . OUTKAST
LaFACE/ARISTA, 2001

Sudden pop stars, they write a song about fame: how to be happy when sadness sells, how to stay sane in a crazy world. Dré closes himself off ("Look straight in my eyes/You might still see a disguise"); Big Boi chugs Pepto-Bismol.

BEST MOMENT Dré encourages karaoke, warbling "Sing *alooong*" as far off-key as it gets. (0:12)

10 "SPREAD"
SPEAKERBOXXX/THE LOVE BELOW
ARISTA, 2003

Boots about to knock? Organ tones, falsetto pillow talk, tiny exploding snares and a rushed, horny rhyme put this Dré-disc album cut in the running for weirdest — and sexiest — booty-call jam ever written.

BEST MOMENT A car races, door slams, feet patter, flies unzip and André squeals, *"Ooo!"* (2:04) *JONAH WEINER*

STANKONIA
CHICAGO
22

Not all *Queer Eye* makeovers are a success.

From top: F. Scott Schafer; Danny Clinch/Corbis Outline

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"Thank God for Outkast!"

They make me smile!

Superstar musicians don't agree on much, but they agree on this: Outkast are friggin' geniuses!

DAVE MATTHEWS
"Thank God for Outkast! If André 3000 and Big Boi were in charge of the space program, we'd be sitting poolside on Mars sipping champagne."

PINK
"They're the most daring and unique duo I could ever think of. They remind me of what I love about music — that it can put a smile on your face and make you want to shake your booty."

PHARRELL WILLIAMS
"André's a genius, point blank. 'Hey Ya!' is incredible. I wouldn't even call it a hip-hop song. It could be, but it's not. It's its own animal."

GWEN STEFANI
"It's exciting to see a group so unique and so well-received. They've combined influences to create something fresh."

NORAH JONES
"They make me smile!"

"Yes, I said *two* more ludicrous 'neckerchiefs.' "

execs heard those songs and offered to release them. "And Dré was like, 'How the fuck do they want to put this shit out, and they didn't want to put mine out?' " Finally, it was agreed that André and Big Boi would each make a solo album, released as an Outkast double CD. But, adds Big Boi, "It took a long time, a lot of phone calls and a lot of crying."

On *The Love Below*, André abandons rap almost completely as he croons the tale of a gigolo (nickname: Ice Cold) who falls in love after a one-night stand but doesn't want to give up a player's life. He tells this conflicted story with fantastic comic timing and a bag full of horny falsetto tricks nicked from vintage Prince albums. Where Big Boi included André in producing and cowriting much of *Speakerboxxx*, Big appears on only one song on *The Love Below* — "Roses," the group's next single and video. "Dré wouldn't let me rap on nothing else," Big says sadly.

> **"In a perfect world, this would be the last Outkast record."**
> **ANDRÉ 3000**

André hasn't had a serious girlfriend since breaking up with neosoul beauty Erykah Badu five years ago (they have a son named Seven, who's 6 years old), and when he's single, he says, he's usually "dirtying up." So is he, like Ice Cold, also a gigolo?

"I wouldn't say that. When it comes to sex, I'm pretty conservative. There's certain shit I hear my homeboys do, and I'll be like, 'Really?' " His eyes pop open. "I've never had a ménage à trois — and I'm an entertainer! Isn't that, like, the first thing you're supposed to do?" He then shares with *Blender* his best estimate of how many women he has had sex with in his 28 years. "Is that a good number? Is that normal?" he asks.

Blender suggests that it's higher than average, and André is appalled. "Please don't print that then, man. Girls judge you by that shit. They may decide they don't want to sleep with you on that." So the purpose of this interview is to help André get more women? "No, not necessarily to get me more. But don't fuck it up for me," he says, laughing.

Lately, André has been discovering vintage punk rock, including the Ramones ("I loved 'em off the bat") and especially Buzzcocks. "I loved the fun and almost stupidness of it." Under their influence, plus that of the Beatles, he wrote "Hey Ya!", which, he says, is "about the state of relationships today, how people stay together because tradition says they should, even if they're unhappy.

"I've always been a girlfriend type of guy, but a girlfriend just doesn't sound pleasing to me right now. When artists get married, their music or films go to shit. Because they don't have trouble, don't have friction. I'd rather talk about being lonely and horny than being together and sad.

"I don't think I'll ever get married," he says resignedly. "Even married →

Clay Patrick McBride (Jones); F. Scott Schafer (André 3000); Mike Marsland/WireImage.com (Pink)

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On *The Tonight Show*, January 2002

Erykah Badu with André's son, Seven Sirius

people tell you, 'Don't get married.' I love being free." On the *Love Below* song "She Lives in My Lap," actress Rosario Dawson asks André, "What are you afraid of?"

What's the answer to that question?

"Captivity, I guess. I get bored really fast."

André's fear of boredom and captivity are also evident in his urge to leave Outkast, since other than his mother, his longest relationship has been with Big Boi, who has three children and also supports his siblings and cousins. "They're very separate personalities, very distinct," LA Reid says. "If you talk to Big Boi, it's numbers, and if you talk to André, it's colors."

"Big is a solid and Dré is a fluid," Cee-Lo explains. "Dré's just eccentric; he has a solitary disposition. They travel on separate buses; on the Smokin' Grooves tour, Dré's bus was him, his cook and his guitar tutor. Big's a people person — he's got that big heart, and he likes being surrounded by loved ones, so everybody else was on his bus, smoking and drinking."

André seems to be a mystery even to his partner. "He said to me the other day, 'We've been working 10 years strong. I'm tired of it.' " Big frowns. "That's not a good enough reason. He said, 'I don't ever want to do those songs again.' 'Rosa Parks,' 'Ms. Jackson,' 'Player's Ball.' " His voice is soft, like a prayer. "It's time for us to do stadiums. You get to a certain level, you master your style and then you throw away your black belt?"

Even André's mother called Big, he says, encouraging him to persuade Dré not to quit. "Everybody on down the line thinks this is a bad move."

"I've never had a ménage à trois — and I'm an entertainer!"
ANDRÉ 3000

A costly one, too. Outkast were offered $1 million for a 60-minute set at a Nashville festival this spring, and André turned it down. "Didn't even flinch," Big Boi says. At a nightly average of $300,000 per show, he estimates Outkast lost $40 million in revenue in the past six months, including ads for beer, milk and soda ("Dré's like, 'I don't drink Coke.' But you *used to* drink Coke!").

Yet Big Boi, for all his annoyance, plans to persist in pressuring André. "He'll change his mind — he always does. He wanted to give up after the record company didn't sign us. He was like, 'Fuck this; I'm gonna go be an architect.' I'm the Jesse Jackson of the group — 'Keep hope alive.' "

"I don't know what the future of Outkast is," André muses. "This would be a great note to leave on." He has already started another group, the Vultures, led by Johnny Vulture, the guitarist whom he plays in the "Hey Ya!" video.

This spring, though, Outkast will begin filming an original movie for HBO, which a source calls "an updated gangster film," and it'll be followed by a film soundtrack in the fall. After that, André 3000 and Big Boi have a full plan for another Outkast album, complete with title and concept.

As any student of rock history or Prince knows, two diversions have regularly spoiled the careers of rock stars: playing jazz, and Hollywood. "And both of those things are going on in Outkast right now," André says with a rueful laugh. "So we fucked up, huh? Might as well start selling incense. I don't know what to say, but I do love jazz. And I want to know more about it."

Outkast will probably continue for a few more years, though not very many. "I don't want to be rapping when I'm 40 years old," André says. "Rap is about youth and energy. I don't want to be 40 years old doing 'Player's Ball.' "

What does he think Big Boi will be doing at 40?

" 'Player's Ball.' " André laughs, acknowledging the difference between the partners. "He'll be like, 'I want to do this shit. Let's run it.' " [BLENDER]

From top: Kevin Winter/Getty Images; Elgin Edmonds/Retna Ltd.

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KANYE WEST

Roc-A-Fella's crown prince gets into a car crash, then makes the first great hip-hop album of 2004

★★★★

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Even Jack White's fisticuffs of fury can't stop these Motor City rockers! Their major-label debut — reviewed

★★★★

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JAMES BROWN

A reissue of the legendary 1962 Apollo Theater barnstormer his record label didn't want you to hear

★★★★★

The Guide

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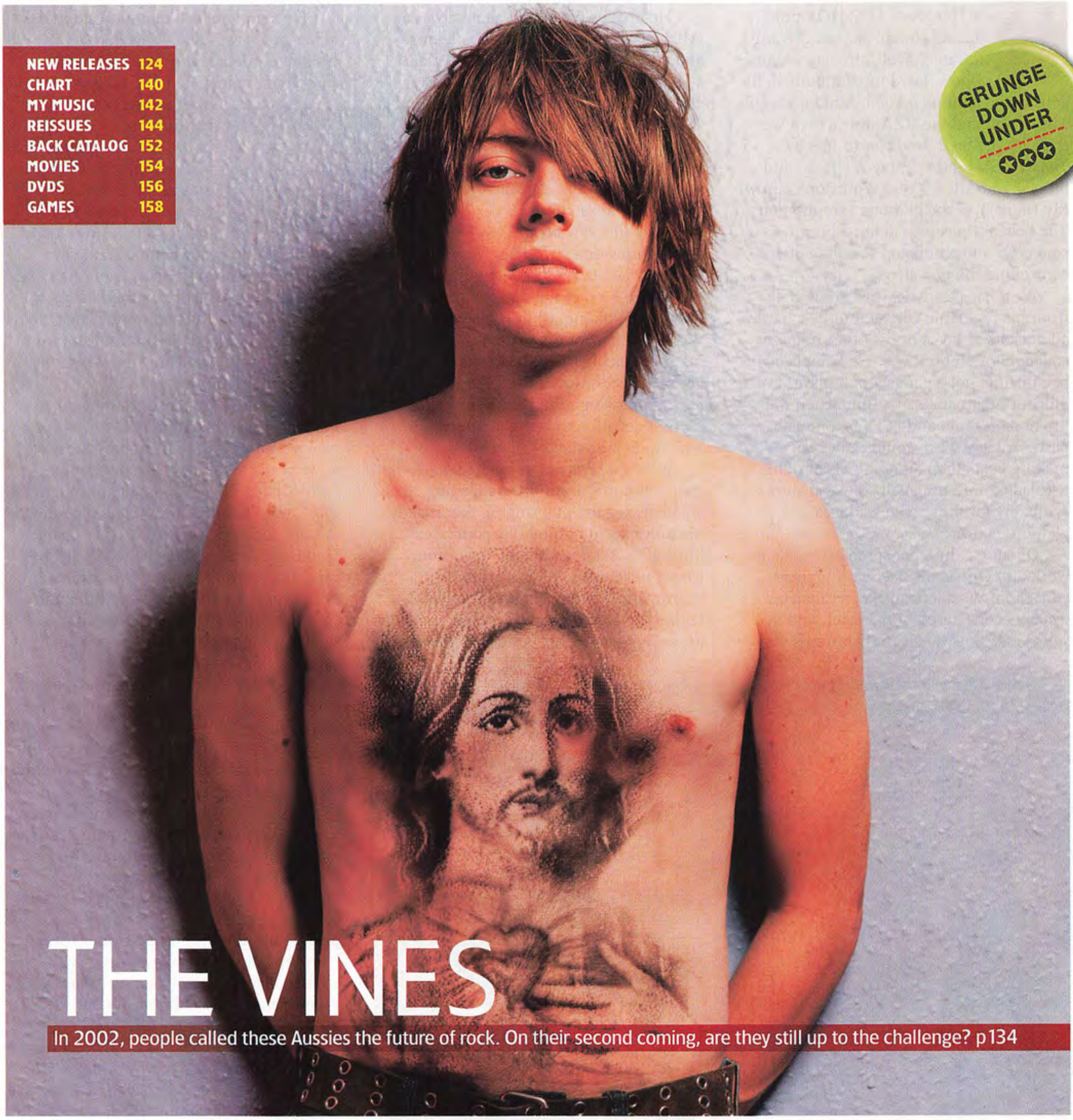

GRUNGE DOWN UNDER

★★★

THE VINES

In 2002, people called these Aussies the future of rock. On their second coming, are they still up to the challenge? p134

Clockwise from top left: Johnny Nunez/WireImage.com; courtesy of Warner Bros.; Chuck Stewart; David LaChapelle/Corbis Outline

King of the Jungle

Jay-Z's favorite producer smashes his jaw, finds Jesus, champions the anti-playa lifestyle

KANYE WEST

THE COLLEGE DROPOUT

✪✪✪✪

ROC-A-FELLA/DEF JAM

WHO SAYS HIP-HOP producers should stay away from the mic? Well, almost everyone who's heard mushmouthed, ill-considered albums made by studio wizards Timbaland and the RZA. But Kanye West, the Chicago-bred producer of hits by Twista ("Slow Jamz"), Jay-Z ("Izzo" and others) and Alicia Keys ("You Don't Know My Name"), is the glorious exception on *The College Dropout*, a debut album he squeezed into a nonstop schedule of controlling the pop charts.

West has clearly learned some tricks from his big-name clients. But he's hardly a knockoff of Jay-Z or his other frequent collaborator, Talib Kweli. He has his own personality: not a gangsta or a player but a diligent pragmatist. At a time when the hip-hop on radio and MTV is a nonstop party fantasy, West would rather be making beats than sipping Cristal in his Escalade. More unusually, he also shows sympathy for those who lead less glamorous lives.

Of course, he's got some problems to work out. One is his beef with higher education: West left college because his teachers considered him a loser, and in songs and skits he gleefully thumbs his nose at grinds who graduate only to get minimum-wage jobs. His other fixation is a 2002 car accident that fractured his jaw and left him not only glad to be alive, but devoutly and openly Christian.

He divides his album as neatly as a syllabus, starting with a group of songs about making a living: "We Don't Care" sees drug dealing as a last-ditch but sensible way to get by, while "Spaceship" has him stuck in a day job at the Gap until he decides to quit. There are a pair of songs about Jesus followed by four comic numbers in a row about picking up women. In "Get 'Em High," he tries to sweet-talk a girl who gets interested only when he mentions Kweli and puts him on the phone, while "The New Workout Plan" offers matter-of-fact instructions like "Give head, stop, breathe, get up, check your weave." Then it's back to realism, with a final few songs about his current devotion to being a family man and hip-hop hustler.

West shows sympathy for those who lead less glamorous lives.

★

West's delivery is unhurried, and when choruses come around, he slips into amateur, regular-guy singing that makes his tunes seem natural. He compares himself to A Tribe Called Quest, from whom he learned Q-Tip's off-the-cuff charm, and when such guests as Jay-Z, Ludacris, Mos Def and Common show up to repay West's contributions to their albums, he sounds casual compared to their superheated attacks. He defers to Twista on the ultrafast finale of "Slow Jamz," which reappears here with an extended intro.

He's not modest, though. Late in the album, in "Last Call," West devotes an elaborately detailed, rhyme-free eight-minute monologue on his career so far; it's like an interview with a backing track, calm hubris in the guise of keepin' it real. He admits, with some exasperation, that labels were more interested in his beats than his rhymes, and he also knows what has made him bankable: sped-up samples from '60s and '70s soul records, such as the Jackson 5 strings in "Izzo." It's no wonder that "Slow Jamz" name-checks R&B hitmakers from Marvin Gaye to Ready for the World; he owes them big-time.

While the familiar tunes provide instant hooks, the chipmunk voices both exploit and mock the sumptuousness of yesteryear's silky soul. The first single turns Chaka Khan's 1985 hit "Through the Fire" into "Through the Wire," his reflection on surviving that car crash: "Thank God I ain't too cool for the seat belt," he raps. He borrows harmony voices and horns from the Jimmy Castor Bunch in "We Don't Care" and grabs Aretha Franklin's "Spirit in the Dark" for his sarcastic "School Spirit."

But West would be a one-trick pony if sped-up soul were his only strength. He's just as impressive when his samples aren't so obvious, hinting at Latin rhythm in the stripped-down riffs of "Get 'Em High" and "Workout Plan," getting blues flavor in "Spaceship," creating a phantom marching army in "Jesus Walks" or stripping funk to a terse minimum in "Breathe In, Breathe Out," his self-conscious playa act with Ludacris: "Always said if I rapped I'd say something significant/But now I'm rapping about money, ho's and rims again."

He knows it's a put-on. After his stretch of cockmanship songs, "Family Business" reminds him of life outside hip-hop, complete with childhood embarrassments and a cousin in jail. West hasn't disappeared into a fantasy world yet. Unglamorous as it seems, maybe he's the rare rapper who'll stay levelheaded. JON PARELES

KANYE WEST HIS GREATEST HITS

JAY-Z
"TAKEOVER" (2001)

At the height of Jay's beef with Nas, West gives Hova the winning edge: He chops up a sample of the Doors' "Five to One" and turns up the bass, while Jay mathematically proves that he's better than his Queens-born rival.

SCARFACE FEAT. JAY-Z AND BEANIE SIGEL
"GUESS WHO'S BACK" (2002)

Handclaps and sunny keyboard plinks turn these three MCs nostalgic — for childhood lessons their mothers taught them and for days spent cooking up crack in the '80s. That's West doing karaoke on the hook.

LUDACRIS
"STAND UP" (2003)

West's version of crunk stomps around the low end and samples not only gasping girls but something that sounds like baying seals. This topped the pop charts.

ALICIA KEYS
"YOU DON'T KNOW MY NAME" (2003)

With cascading pianos and lush Philly Soul, West helped Keys sell more than 600,000 albums her first week out. JONAH WEINER

Ludacris: "This is the Chinese sign for 'stupid jacket.'"

This page, from left: Berry Behrendt/Retna Ltd.; Allen Clark/Retna Ltd. Opposite page: Lego

Kanye West shows off his spotted cougar, Appalachian buck and prized "stuffed brown sofa."

AMBULANCE LTD

AMBULANCE LTD ✪✪✪✪

TVT

New York retro-pop fivesome makes the first great debut of 2004

There are 8 million rock references in Ambulance Ltd's naked city. Cribbing from the Mesozoic era (Beatles, Kinks, Stones), the tortured medieval period (Pixies, My Bloody Valentine, Nirvana) and beyond, they're bona fide history buffs. But on their debut, they're confidently, resolutely themselves, thanks largely to Marcus Congleton's weathered-bronze vocals: airy and pointed, sunny and sorrowful at once. "Stay Tuned" is a necklace of shark's teeth, pop with a glorious sense of menace lurking beneath its glittering surface. Elsewhere, the nouveau-psychedelic swirl of "Heavy Lifting" takes '80s British power-pop to tumultuous, soaring vistas before trailing off into a dreamy, soft-focus march. As the White Stripes and the Strokes have proved, looking back is the new looking forward. Ambulance Ltd have good ears and an even better imagination: They run their influences through a filter of solid gold.

STEPHANIE ZACHAREK

DOWNLOAD THESE "Heavy Lifting," "Stay Where You Are," "Stay Tuned"

THE SCORE »

✪✪✪✪✪
EXCELLENT. A MUST-HAVE

✪✪✪✪
GREAT. CHECK IT OUT

✪✪✪
GOOD IN ITS GENRE

✪✪
JUST OK

✪
WEAK

THE BAD PLUS

GIVE ✪✪

COLUMBIA

New York jazz trio can't even make "Iron Man" swing

Ethan Iverson approaches his piano the way metalheads attack rhythm guitars: His chords are two-fisted affairs, thundering along in a monster's lurching gait. His favorite rhythms have a cartoonish subversion to them — here he is, doing a Mexican hat dance (the gloriously named "Cheney Piñata"); here he is executing a bumbling, out-of-control tarantella. What he and his band don't offer is anything remotely melodic; they do more of the crashing-and-bashing that made last year's *These Are the Vistas* a leftfield curiosity, if not a jazz-bin hit. That means more outlandish instrumental treatments of esteemed pop songs (a clattering version of Black Sabbath's "Iron Man" manages to drain the elegance from that enduring theme), and a steady stream of meta-concept showboating — it's music that's all cleverness and fury from a distance, but when studied up close, it turns out to be pretty hollow.

TOM MOON

DOWNLOAD THIS "1979 Semi-Finalist"

Blondie's Debbie Harry: "Hold on a second while I change my head."

THE BLASTERS

LIVE: GOING HOME ✪✪✪

SHOUT FACTORY

Americana greats offer a souvenir from their final reunion tour

For a brief and what they described as "final" run last summer, the original lineup of the Blasters — led by Alvin brothers Dave (guitar, songs) and Phil (chesty bellow) — once again romped through the honky-tonk blues, rockabilly and jittery zydeco that galvanized West Coast post-punk in the late '70s. The shows were typically banzai affairs; these unfrozen cavemen delivered high-octane bar-clearing heroics, traveling back to the time before alt-country became a lifestyle choice and jump blues had yet to be voodoo-daddied into novelty. Sure, part of the magic came from hearing this crack rhythm section simply re-creating songs like "Marie Marie," the resolute "So Long Baby, Goodbye" and a tomcatting "Help You Dream." But these diehards also brought to the stage a distinct sense that no matter how much nostalgia surrounds this music, it can still be an ornery, fire-breathing demon when played by the right hands.

TOM MOON

DOWNLOAD THESE "So Long Baby, Goodbye," "Marie Marie"

STEPPIN' OUT

Hey, ladies: Can these Scottish art-punks buy you a drink?

FRANZ FERDINAND

FRANZ FERDINAND ✪✪✪✪

DOMINO

» FRANZ FERDINAND — named for the Austrian archduke whose assassination touched off World War I — charm in spite of themselves. Mid-twentysomethings who broke onto the top of the U.K. charts with "Take Me Out," the band combines frantic guitar, disco-inflected beats and boyishly sassy vocals recalling, at first blush, such return-of-rock acts as the Strokes and the Rapture.

Showing up late doesn't mean you can't be the life of the party, though. Led by skinny-tied playboy Alex Kapranos, the foursome slather their impeccable Talking Heads, Gang of Four and Orange Juice nicks with brash, booze-fueled attitude. If there were a post-punk university, they'd be presidents of the frat house.

The band's debut struts and flirts like the best-looking guy at the bar. An irresistible ode to pushy come-ons, "Take Me Out" opens sweet and dark as fudge, then morphs into syncopated art-rock that's lighter than cotton candy. "Jacqueline" morphs from a hushed acoustic lament of a teen's working life into a manic, swaggering slacker manifesto. "It's always better on holiday!" Kapranos shouts.

With all this glittery, piss-off posturing, it can be hard to tell if the band cares about anything besides impressing girls. Not that their whimsy isn't welcome. "Matinee" strings together a funk chorus and jumbo riff as Kapranos hilariously croons his fantasy of appearing on the BBC, and "Michael," an effervescent rump-shaker with staccato guitar, could be about a sloppy buddy or the scandalized owner of Neverland Ranch.

Even Lotharios need to prove they're not just wearing beer goggles. Sometimes these seductive poses seem intended only for the mirror — especially unbecomingly boorish anthems like "Cheating on You." With a grin as beguiling as theirs, why should they sneer? *NICK CATUCCI*

DOWNLOAD THESE "Take Me Out," "Matinee"

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» **MISSION OF BURMA**
MISSION OF BURMA *RYKODISC*

» **RADIO 4**
GOTHAM! *GERN BLANDSTEN*

> They're presidents of the post-punk frat house.

BLONDIE

THE CURSE OF BLONDIE ✪✪✪

SANCTUARY

NYC New Wavers put an indelible formula through fresh changes

Few bands have performed the stardom/breakup/reunion hustle with more élan than Blondie. Singer-symbol Debbie Harry pursued the usual solo career with unusual avant-garde chutzpah; guitarist-Svengali Chris Stein hung on to his songwriting chops through life-threatening illness; and their 1999 comeback album, *No Exit*, ranked with the group's '70s classics. At a slightly diminished level, so does this well-worked follow-up. Dub, metal, Okinawan folk, hip-hop and various strains of out jazz all inflect Blondie's hooky popcraft, and they never pretend they're something they're not, such as young. Feisty, however, they remain: "White as a Tic-Tac/Why don't you take a dirt nap?" Harry raps to an inadequate male. To which he could reply: "You are too, and *you're* not ready."

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

DOWNLOAD THESE "Shakedown," "End to End"

BR549

TANGLED IN THE PINES ✪✪

DUALTONE

They're mavericks. If you compare them to the Mavericks

Cutting their teeth as house band in a combined bar-and-country duds store, these Nashville residents have offered wry country-rock since 1993. More recently, they lost their label, longtime members Gary Bennett and Smilin' Jay McDowell and a hyphen from their name (it used to live between the "5" and the "49"). But they sound unperturbed on their fifth studio album, their first of all-original material. New co-singer Chris Scruggs contributes the witty Hank Williams pastiche "Honky Tonkin' Lifestyle" and cowrites the title track. Otherwise, main man Chuck Mead's ultra-trad aesthetic reigns: There's a train song, a rock number and ever-lonesome violin. Amiable, if bland, BR549 are a bar band with a job to do. Better make this next one a double.

TONY POWER

DOWNLOAD THIS "Honky Tonkin' Lifestyle"

BR549: "Hey, guys, a little help with this double bass? Guys? Guys? . . ."

BRIDES OF DESTRUCTION

HERE COME THE BRIDES ✪✪✪

SANCTUARY

Nikki Sixx's post-Mötley crew returns to the wild side

Mötley Crüe's Nikki Sixx and L.A. Guns' Tracii Guns know more than a little about the Sunset Strip's seedier back alleys, and their latest side project is, naturally, littered with bad girls, bad attitude and bad habits. Brides of Destruction's twenty-first-century spin on '80s L.A. rock is forward-thinking and nastily catchy despite a few too many moments of hard-rock déjà vu from singer London LeGrand — his stylistic aping of frontmen from Steven Tyler to Queensrÿche's Geoff Tate wears thin. But the album's closing track, the sweeping "Only Get So Far," provides a glimmer of just how beautiful these Brides can be: LeGrand finally drops his affectations, while Guns's soaring, luscious guitar solo reaches heights not heard since his 1990 lighter-hoister "The Ballad of Jayne" cracked the Top 40.

MAURA JOHNSTON

DOWNLOAD THESE "I Don't Care," "Only Get So Far"

ASTONISHING FACT! >>

BR549 made their Nashville reputation by playing nonstop five-hour-long sets — without any bathroom breaks!

BROKEN SOCIAL SCENE

BEE HIVES ✪✪✪

ARTS & CRAFTS

Hard-to-find goodies from the best Canuck progsters since Rush

And the award for outstanding achievement in the fields of emo, prog and psychedelia — all in one song — goes to this fearlessly arty Toronto collective. Last year's *You Forgot It in People* was a fine hybrid of cathartic guitar riffs and dense, exploratory prog-rock, and this new collection of B-sides, radio sessions and other miscellany proves that triumph wasn't a fluke. Throughout, small, intimate sounds build into multilayered epics, unfolding outward and taking more unexpected turns than *The Return of the King*. These songs are mostly instrumental, but "Backyards" features a delicate female voice — it sounds childlike until you notice her spooky, puzzling lyrics ("They lost their lives in backyards," she repeats), which take us into off-putting *Poltergeist* territory. Like a dream, it sticks with you.

BEN SISARIO

DOWNLOAD THESE "Backyards," "hHallmark"

Brides of Destruction: Don't ask where he's got the rest of their name tattooed.

CHALLENGER

GIVE PEOPLE WHAT THEY WANT IN LETHAL DOSES ✪✪✪✪

JADE TREE

On scorching debut, Chicago polit-rockers rail against Dubya's policies, food courts

With their other band, Milemarker, Chicago zinesters Al Burian and Dave Laney nailed the punk blueprint — political fury, aural intensity, charismatic delivery — with one glaring flaw: no songs. Here, they replace chilly keyboard drones with a ferocious red-meat guitar assault, and it's a drastic improvement: Challenger's debut is an instantly memorable collection of short, sharp shocks. They're hardly the world's greatest singers, but Laney and Burian are excellent rabble-rousers with a knack for turning barks and bays into anthems. On the chant-alongs "Death Museum" and "Brand Loyalty," the two rail against apathy, so-called "moral clarity" and shopping malls. Luckily, this isn't just "burn Pacific Sunwear" this, "firebomb Cinnabon" that — these boys have the hooks and self-awareness to back up their sanctimony.

ANDY GREENWALD

DOWNLOAD THESE "Blackouts," "Crushed City," "Input the Output"

CROSSFADE

CROSSFADE ✪✪

COLUMBIA

Creed were *Blender's* twenty-third-worst band of all time. This nü-grunge troupe should have been footnoted

When South Carolina thrash-metallers the Nothing realized they'd get more famous working at the post office than pumping out dense, headbangers-only noise, they adopted the grungier handle Crossfade and threw their Metallica riffs out with their spiked wristbands. Here, they infuse their songs with lunging, distorted guitars and pained vocals straight out of Creed, Puddle of Mudd and P.O.D.; they can rock hard, but syrupy, harmony-laden choruses derail any momentum. Then there are Ed Sloan's lyrics, which read like the math-class scribbles of a pissed-off 12-year-old: "I am a part of a world that I hate/I wish the end would come faster, my world's a disaster," from "Starless." He's got his arms wide open, but no one's going to hug back.

JON WIEDERHORN

DOWNLOAD THIS "Starless"

DESTROYER

YOUR BLUES ✪✪✪

MERGE

Candian glam fanatics make show tunes cool on sixth album

Dan Bejar is best known as the glam-loving secret weapon in the Vancouver indie troupe New Pornographers, but further under the radar (and deeper into the velvet goldmine), he's the restless mind behind these dandyish art-rockers. You wouldn't call his reedy whine conventionally attractive, but it perfectly fits wise-ass gotchas like "The future's yours/No, wait — I lied"; meanwhile, his faux-symphonic compositions are dense and volatile, liable to mutate at any moment or even lapse into a plagiarized refrain. But *Your Blues* is

I LOVE THIS CD!

KATE BOSWORTH

ACTRESS IN *WIN A DATE WITH TAD HAMILTON!*

VARIOUS ARTISTS

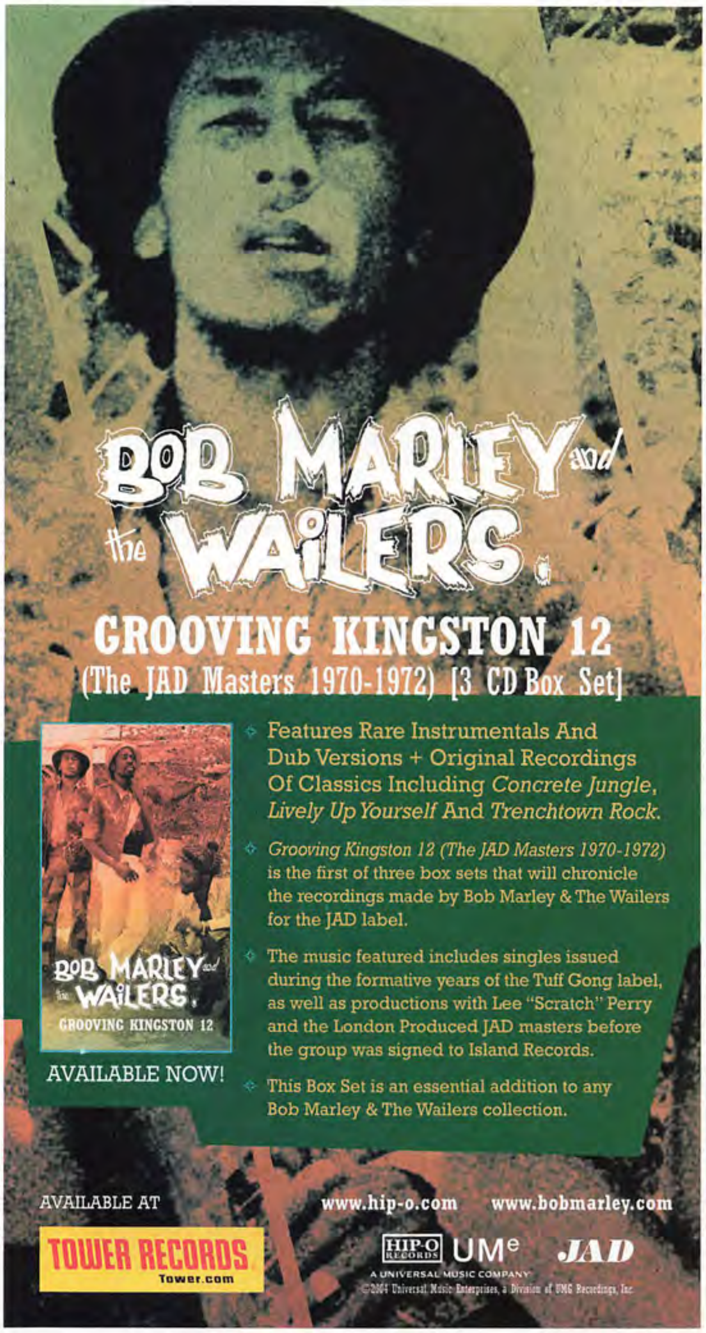
MAGNOLIA ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK

WARNER BROS.

"I'm in love with this soundtrack. Aimee Mann is incredible. Those songs are so beautiful."

* Note: Not all of the "Download These" songs are legally available for download — yet. In those instances, *Blender* encourages you to purchase the original CD. Opposite page, from top: Chris Floyd/Camera Press/Retna Ltd.; Joe Dilworth. This page, clockwise from top: Courtesy of Sony Music; Ernie Stewart/Retna Ltd.; John Harrell

HIP HOP
Box Set
HITTIN' YOU UP ON
4:20



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John Frusciante "celebrates" his three-star review.

Destroyer's slickest synthesis yet of ornate hooks and cryptic poetics, with a sense of melodrama that's so insistent, almost every song demands its own high-kicking chorus line — for those who have ever wondered what a Stephen Malkmus–penned musical might sound like, here's the astonishing answer.

DENNIS LIM

DOWNLOAD THESE "What Road," "An Actor's Revenge"

DILATED PEOPLES

NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH ✪✪✪

CAPITOL

Los Angeles hip-hop purists keep it real . . . boring

"STUCK IN 1992" ALERT

"I don't train for sprints, I train for marathons," raps laid-back MC Evidence on Dilated Peoples' third full-length. There's some truth to his odd boast, but not in the way he means it: Over the long haul, Evidence, rapper Rakaa and DJ-producer Babu's beefy, purist approach gets monotonous and taxing, punctuated by brief spurts of energy. The promising threesome spend most of their time in a creative rut, largely because of an unrelenting adherence to a diet of chunky beats and straightforward battle rhymes — neither of which is particularly easy to digest. Guest/producer Kanye West's turn on the polished, sing-songy "This Way" is a welcome change of pace, as is the jagged posse cut "Closed Session" and the teetering, guitar-driven "Marathon." These prove Dilated have what it takes to finish the race, but here they're stuck running in circles.

HUA HSU

DOWNLOAD THIS "This Way"

I LOVE THIS CD!

MICHAEL MADSEN
ACTOR IN *KILL BILL VOL. 2*

VARIOUS ARTISTS
KILL BILL VOL. 1 SOUNDTRACK
MAVERICK

"An awesome album, and I'm not blowing smoke up your ass. That Nancy Sinatra song, 'Bang Bang' — when you hear that, you know it's on."

DIOS

DIOS ✪✪✪

STAR TIME INTERNATIONAL

Shoegazing goes sexy on Southern Californians' debut album

Hawthorne, California, is a once-sleepy L.A. suburb that woke up screaming one day. Put it this way: In the '60s, Hawthorne produced the Beach Boys; two decades later, it coughed up hardcore spazzoids Black Flag. So Dios, its latest exports, are like pop sandmen, a charmingly shaggy quintet that takes its time. "Birds" sounds like Grandaddy dozing off in front of the TV, and "50 Cents" is about having just that much in your pocket and being OK. Their dreamy harmonies, relaxed, Neil Young–ish vocals and sleepwalking tempos flourish, as does a psychedelic country tint. Sweet, sincere and heart-on-their-sleeve romantic, Dios could end up bringing back slow-dancing. They're well on their way to bringing back Hawthorne.

RJ SMITH

DOWNLOAD THESE "50 Cents," "Starting Five"

JOHN FRUSCIANTE

SHADOWS COLLIDE WITH PEOPLE ✪✪✪

WARNER BROS.

On Chili Peppers–ish solo album, guitarist kicks the heroin — and loony experimentalism — of his past

A far cry from this former junkie's early, experimental solo releases (one of which was made solely, he has confessed, to finance his heroin addiction), this polished, hook-filled album also demonstrates just how much credit the guitarist should receive for the Red Hot Chili Peppers' mega-success. Many of the songs here could be Peppers tracks, except for the absence of Anthony Kiedis's vocals — more than adequately replaced here by Frusciante's melancholic croon — and the slap-happy bass of Flea, who turns up only for the acoustic lament "The Slaughter." You don't get a sense that Frusciante's saving his best material for the next band release when listening to "Chances," "Omission" or the beautiful "Song to Sing When I'm Lonely." Although what point he's trying to make with the screeching ➔

From top: Tony Wolliscroft; Sara DeBoer/Retna Ltd.

> He's hip-hop's nostalgia king.

Shawn Mortensen/Corbis Outline

MOUTHING OFF

Fourth album from the Wu-Tang Clan's freak-out kid

GHOSTFACE KILLAH

THE PRETTY TONEY ALBUM

✪✪✪✪

DEF JAM

GHOSTFACE KILLAH raps like he gets paid by the exclamation point. Bug-eyed and hysterical, he's Wu-Tang's resident "sensitive thug" — so sensitive that the slightest disturbance sends him into a panic of gasps, sobs and squeals where rhythm and respiration are afterthoughts. Over three solo albums, he's proved to be the Clan's most consistently exciting MC, and the winning streak doesn't stop here.

In the past, his raps were impressionistic splatters dense with street code. Here, however, you can understand Ghost's tantrums, because he rhymes with a cinematic clarity worthy of slinger-songwriters like Mobb Deep and Notorious B.I.G. On the suspenseful "Masquerade," he paints a love triangle-turned-Mexican standoff in a Best Western; elsewhere, he recalls the OshKosh jumper he wore as a kid, taking a shit in the bathroom of a crush named Keisha ("Summer Night").

This kind of nuanced flashback proves once again (see 1996's "All That I Got Is You," featuring Mary J. Blige, and 2000's humming "Child's Play") that he's hip-hop's reigning nostalgia king. If *The Wonder Years* ever comes to BET, Ghost can play Kevin.

Vintage soul emphasizes the throwback feel, whether Ghost's recalling puppy love or stick-ups: The Delfonics, the Moments and Dave Porter are all sampled or interpolated. He says these acts calm him down, but calm for Ghost is still Red Level threat for most.

No surprise, then, that the best song here streams sweat: "Run" stages a breathless chase complete with narcs, a dropped .45, piss-stained apartment hallways, tossed crack vials, a getaway car and one flattened police hound. The only thing more incredible than RZA's fiery beat — all howling Spaghetti Western horns and Bomb Squad drums — is that Ghost actually tops its intensity: "Run! I will not give up! No, quick, flag the car down/Take me to — 'Yo-yo-yo, Ghost, here they come now!'/*Errrr!* Pull off quick, back up, hit the bitch dog!" Get this man to his panic room, quick. *JONAH WEINER*

DOWNLOAD THESE "Run," "Paychecks"

GHOSTFACE KILLAH'S CURRENT LISTENING

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instrumental "Negative 00 Ghost 27" is anyone's guess.

CLARK COLLIS

DOWNLOAD THESE "Omission," "Song to Sing When I'm Lonely"

IRON & WINE

OUR ENDLESS NUMBERED DAYS ✪✪✪

SUB POP

Florida navel-gazer in the running for quietest rocker alive

Sam Beam doesn't want to wake anyone up. The arrangements on the Miami singer-songwriter's second full-length Iron & Wine album are played as softly as he (and his occasional collaborators) can manage — finger-picked guitar, the occasional touch of banjo or lightly brushed drums and singing so breathy that he barely enunciates his vague, meditative lyrics at all. It's an approach that works for certain kinds of late-night records (think those of Nick Drake or Elliott Smith), and *Our Endless Numbered Days* is as light as dust in a lamp beam, offering a couple of exquisite, lacy melodies. But pay too much attention to these songs, and they dissolve into sweetly harmonized meaninglessness.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD THIS "Each Coming Night"

JOJO

JOJO ✪✪✪

BLACKGROUND/UNIVERSAL

Former *America's Most Talented Kid* singer tries to climb from audition circuit to the pros

She didn't win NBC's youngster version of *American Idol,* but that hasn't stopped this 13-year-old suburbanite from recruiting some of the same writer-producers who nurtured Aaliyah into an alluring icon and making her own grab for stardom. Over the skipping New Jack guitars of "Happy Song" and "City Lights," she's wise: Staying within her vocal range and reveling in her own adolescent innocence, she strikes a charming pop pose. Elsewhere, though, she plays dress-up, primping herself into an R&B seductress, riding hip-twisting beats and lyrics about burning desire. Trouble is, JoJo is neither refined nor old enough to pull it off beyond a suitable *Idol*-esque facsimile. On these songs, it's as though she's vamping in her mother's size 9 stilettos — silly and plodding.

JOSEPH PATEL

DOWNLOAD THIS "City Lights"

I LOVE THIS CD!

DWAYNE "THE ROCK" JOHNSON
ASS-WHUPPER IN *WALKING TALL*

VARIOUS ARTISTS
MARTIN SCORSESE PRESENTS THE BLUES
HIP-O

"It's the soundtrack to the TV special he did, and it moved me. I love the blues, and this has everyone from Muddy Waters to Keb' Mo'."

JUST JACK

THE OUTER MARKER ✪✪

TVT

It's the U.K.'s answer to U.K. rapper the Streets. Wait a minute . . .

GO BACK HOME, LIMEY!

Following in the wake of fellow Britrap contender the Streets comes Jack Alsopp, a hotly tipped suburban white-soul boy who — like the Streets' Mike Skinner — rapped, sang, wrote and produced most of his debut. Alsopp, 24, tries to map out similar terrain, but his tales of life and love among London's lower-middle-class geezers fail to excite. The bland, New Age hip house backing could be the problem, or perhaps it's lyrics that work hard to mean something but often don't ("Contradiction is the structure in which we live!" he observes). Worse still, a cloud of quasi-spiritual gobbledygook further fogs the picture until all that can be made out are the outlines of Brit-hop predecessors Massive Attack and Stereo MCs that Alsopp lamely impersonates.

ANDY PEMBERTON

DOWNLOAD THESE None

BEN KWELLER

ON MY WAY ✪✪✪

ATO/RCA

Teen hype king turned humble singer-songwriter releases his second solo album

In the mid-'90s, Ben Kweller could wallpaper his house with press clippings about himself. As precocious teen leader of the grunge band Radish, he was the object of a major-label bidding war — but the group split in 1999 with nary a hype-fulfilling hit. With *On My Way,* he plots a more modest course as a singer-songwriter, showing a fondness for wobbly power-pop. Harmonica and xylophone show up, but Kweller's skeletal songs rely mostly on his acoustic guitar, garage-y riffs and swinging, Beatlesque piano. His lyrics are either affectingly goofy ("I'll kill him with karate/That I learned in Japan") or idiosyncratically intimate ("Sometimes I wish I had a farm/ Where the only pollution is your ➔

Carmen Valdes/Retna Ltd.

Curly hair? How ironic!

Sheryl Nields

SUNNY OUTLOOK

Avril's stepmom softens up, still hates her exes

ALANIS MORISSETTE

SO-CALLED CHAOS ★★★

MAVERICK/WARNER BROS.

AS ALANIS MORISSETTE turns 30 this spring, the precocious, impatient truth-teller of 1995's *Jagged Little Pill*, the best-selling solo record by a female artist ever, has softened into a more forgiving voice who takes pains to see both sides of the romantic conflicts that still bedevil her, and has overcome her urge to scold.

Morissette hasn't forsaken earnest psychologizing. In the jargon-laced "Everything," she criticizes her own "passive-aggressiveness" and tendency to "withhold." The relationships in these songs still describe power struggles in which her feminist principles clash with an impulse to be submissive, but it's no longer a case of master and servant.

The music still bluntly mixes post-punk haranguing with singer-songwriter confessionalism. Her signature sound — voice snarling through a tangle of massed guitars — is here, but so is a softer, more vulnerable tone. The melodies, while radio-ready, have a stomping insistence. An occasional note of exoticism (sitar flavors "Doth I Protest Too Much?") colors the arrangements.

Most of the songs seem to address boyfriends present and past. Even in quieter numbers, she asserts her feelings in a stiff diction that disregards the normal rhythms of conversational speech.

It's impressive, though, that her insights come across as fiercely intelligent, hard-won nuggets of wisdom gleaned from self-scrutiny that allows ambivalence and uncertainty, instead of as accusations.

A cautious optimism reigns. In "Out Is Through," which addresses the impulse to abandon a relationship when things get rocky, she resolves to stick with it. And "This Grudge," a proclamation of forgiveness to an old lover, has flashes of a tight-lipped, self-effacing humor. Declaring she's tired of her own voice, she tells a man whom she has "vilified and used as fodder" for 14 years that he deserves a "piece of every record." But don't imagine that she's gone mushy. This brainy seeker of truth and emotional well-being remains a proudly independent spirit. Forgiveness becomes her. *STEPHEN HOLDEN*

DOWNLOAD THESE "Out Is Through," "Everything"

ALANIS MORISSETTE'S CURRENT LISTENING

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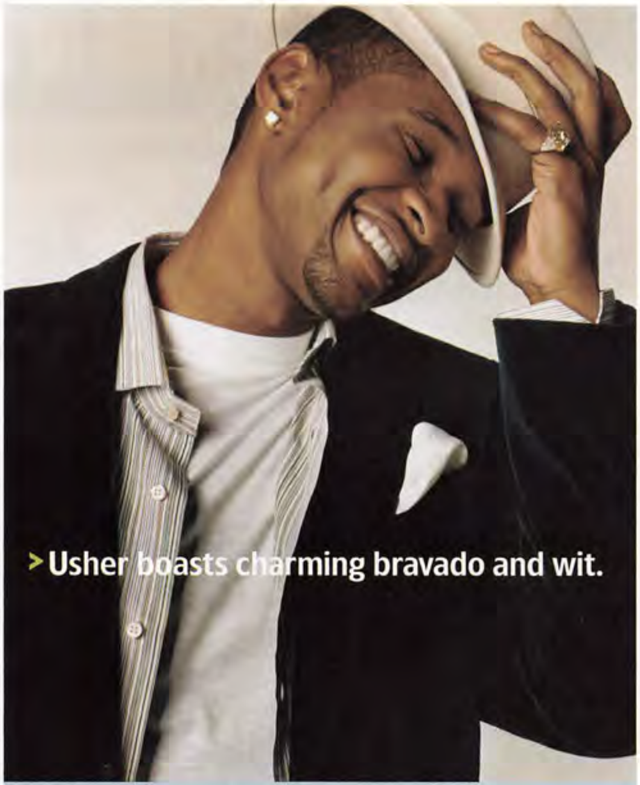
>Usher boasts charming bravado and wit.

TOUGH LOVE

Sorry, girls: Usher's fifth album is for the roughnecks

USHER

CONFESSIONS ✪✪✪

ARISTA

SURPRISINGLY, GIVEN his fey voice and delicate image, Atlanta R&B dandy Usher has always had a soft spot for hard club tracks. Ladies may disagree, but 1997's "You Make Me Wanna" and 2001's "U Don't Have to Call" far outshine the melisma-filled ballads that have typically populated his albums and earned him the cast-away panties of swooning females.

Usher has finally gotten the memo. "Yeah!", the lead single, is probably the scariest record — in a good way — he's ever made, and it's the first song of any note to mate mainstream R&B and menacing Southern crunk. Produced by the ubiquitous Lil Jon and featuring guest verses from Ludacris, it embodies everything that's right with Atlanta's rich R&B scene — nervy beats that pummel and bobble simultaneously, a charming sexual bravado and a hint of self-aware wit.

On "Yeah!", Usher smartly shares the spotlight. For every silky ribbon he sends flying upward, there's a throat-rending Lil Jon growl dragging it back to the soil, and offsetting Usher's every heady come-on, there's an ungentlemanly Ludacris punch line. The ensemble helps ground his diva ambitions; ditto for "Red Light" (another Lil Jon production) and "Caught Up," which thumps like a Southern marching band performing late-'80s R&B. On both, Usher's voice plays like just another rhythm instrument.

Unadorned, though, Usher rubs up against his limitations. His songwriting isn't a strength, and his ballads often drown in their own inanity. Of all the album's slow jams, "Burn" is the sole serviceable one: Usher's falsetto nicely soft-sells the tale of a relationship that's fading to black. But on the others that fill out *Confessions'* middle — "Truth Hurts," "Superstar" — he sounds like he's a boy auditioning for the last spot in the school choir.

Wisely, at album's end, Usher returns to the funk. He echoes Michael Jackson on "Take Your Hand," with its fatty bass licks and stop-and-start bridge. Taking the spotlight off himself, it turns out, is the closest to true greatness Usher gets. *JON CARAMANICA*

DOWNLOAD THESE "Yeah!", "Take Your Hand"

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- **GINUWINE ...THE BACHELOR** *EPIC*
- **LSG LEVERT SWEAT GILL** *EAST WEST*

cigarettes"). Much of this sounds as though it were written in a day and captured on first take, but rarely does simple charm go so far.

ALEC HANLEY BEMIS

DOWNLOAD THESE "Hospital Bed," "On My Way"

AMEL LARRIEUX

BRAVEBIRD ✪✪✪✪

BLISS LIFE

Soul radical with a Bono-size heart and a hatred for circumcision

Not many R&B singers would think to write a song lamenting the custom of female circumcision in Africa; even fewer would wrap it around a house beat so supple that you're nodding your head long before you've twigged what the lyrics are about. The title track of Amel Larrieux's second album serves notice that she's not your everyday songbird. The jazz-trained singer (formerly of down-tempo hip-hop duo Groove Theory) manages to be politically outspoken without sounding like she's standing over the listener wagging a rolled-up copy of *Newsweek*. Whether she's crooning a sparse protest song straight out of a Greenwich Village coffeehouse ("Sacred") or reflecting on the raw deal women get "from Pakistan down to Soweto and New York City" ("Givin' Something Up"), she's smart, subtle and quietly radical.

DORIAN LYNSKEY

DOWNLOAD THESE "Bravebird," "Givin' Something Up," "Congo"

SONDRE LERCHE

TWO WAY MONOLOGUE ✪✪✪✪

ASTRALWERKS

Norwegian singer-songwriter worships the Beach Boys, turns out surprising sophomore effort

NORDIC MR. NICE GUY

Unless church-burning, crypto-fascist black-metal bands are your thing, it's unlikely that you would consider Norway a rock hotspot. In recent years, however, the rural town of Bergen has emerged as an unlikely hive of musical activity, spawning both the icy techno of Röyksopp and a thriving acoustic scene, including 24-year-old Sondre Lerche. He's less winsome than his fellow Bergenites Kings of Convenience, and his second album offers a warm sound, subtle string and brass arrangements, idiosyncratic vocals and jollier melodies than your average bedroom troubadour. On the excellent "Wet Ground," he comes up with a unique and entrancing blend of Beach Boy harmonies and Broadway balladry, making *Two Way Monologue* an unexpected delight.

JAMES SLAUGHTER

DOWNLOAD THIS "Wet Ground"

Anthony Mandler

TOBY LIGHTMAN

LITTLE THINGS ✪✪✪

LAVA

Folk-funk debut from 25-year-old New Yorker flies across the map

Toby Lightman grew up idolizing Stevie Wonder but was schizophrenically drawn toward Def Leppard, too. So it's no surprise that her debut has a confusing musical DNA. For the first three tracks, Lightman is Nelly Furtado, right down to the way she chews each word before letting it loose over a funky rhythm. Eight tracks later, on the sublime "Front Row," she's Alicia Keys, and toward the end, she's doing her very best Bonnie Raitt impersonation. *Little Things*, then, is all over the place, but its thematic inconsistencies are also its main strength: They highlight her ability to sing whatever — and however — she damn well pleases.

NICK DUERDEN

DOWNLOAD THESE "Leave It Inside," "Little Thing"

LOCAL H

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO P.J. SOLES? ✪✪✪

STUDIO E

Efficient Illinois unit forges on past major-label cultdom

Before Jack and Meg were even an item, Local H were a power duo: unrelenting guitarist-vocalist (and also, clandestinely, bassist) Scott Lucas, and a drummer — dynamite Joe Daniels on their terrific '90s Island albums, heavier Brian St. Clair after label support collapsed. Dedicated to another faded cult hero, the female lead of the 1979 teen-rebellion farce *Rock 'n' Roll High School*, Local H's latest offers up Lucas's usual strong songs, loud and tuneful enough to hold their own with, for instance, those of Cheap Trick. But the material is no longer wild enough to blow the competition off the stage with the youthful belief that eternal energy will carry all before it. On one song, Mom and Dad call. Not to worry, Lucas insists: "I'm alive, like everyone's alive."

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

DOWNLOAD THESE "Everyone Alive," "Heavy Metal Bakesale"

I LOVE THIS CD!

CEDRIC THE ENTERTAINER

COMEDIAN-ACTOR IN *BARBERSHOP 2*

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SPEAKERBOXXX/ THE LOVE BELOW

ARISTA

"One of the most unique albums of the year. André 3000 is experimental, and his writing is interesting. It's a fun album to listen to."

Mary Lou Lord: We hope she's laughing about that scarf.

MARY LOU LORD

BABY BLUE ✪✪✪

RUBRIC

Onetime subway busker resurfaces with a cure for those subterranean homesick blues

An underground troubadour both literally and figuratively, Mary Lou Lord made a modest name for herself busking in London and Boston subway stations from the late '80s through the '90s. While plenty of neofolkies out there put out more records than they ought to, Lord doesn't make enough. For now at least, *Baby Blue*, a selection of songs written largely by Lord's friend and collaborator Nick Saloman (of psychedelic revivalists the Bevis Frond), redresses that wrong. She gives us a breakup song with meat on its bones ("Because He's Leaving") and a pop ballad with Appalachia in its blood ("Old Tin Tray"), not to mention a sturdy-but-tender Badfinger cover ("Baby Blue"). Lord's voice is breathy and sweet without being tiresomely innocent or fragile — it's Candyland by way of Troubletown. And even though she used to give it away in subway tunnels, it's a sound worth paying for.

STEPHANIE ZACHAREK

DOWNLOAD THESE "The Wind Blew All Around Me," "Because He's Leaving"

RAUL MALO, PAT FLYNN, ROB ICKES & DAVE POMEROY

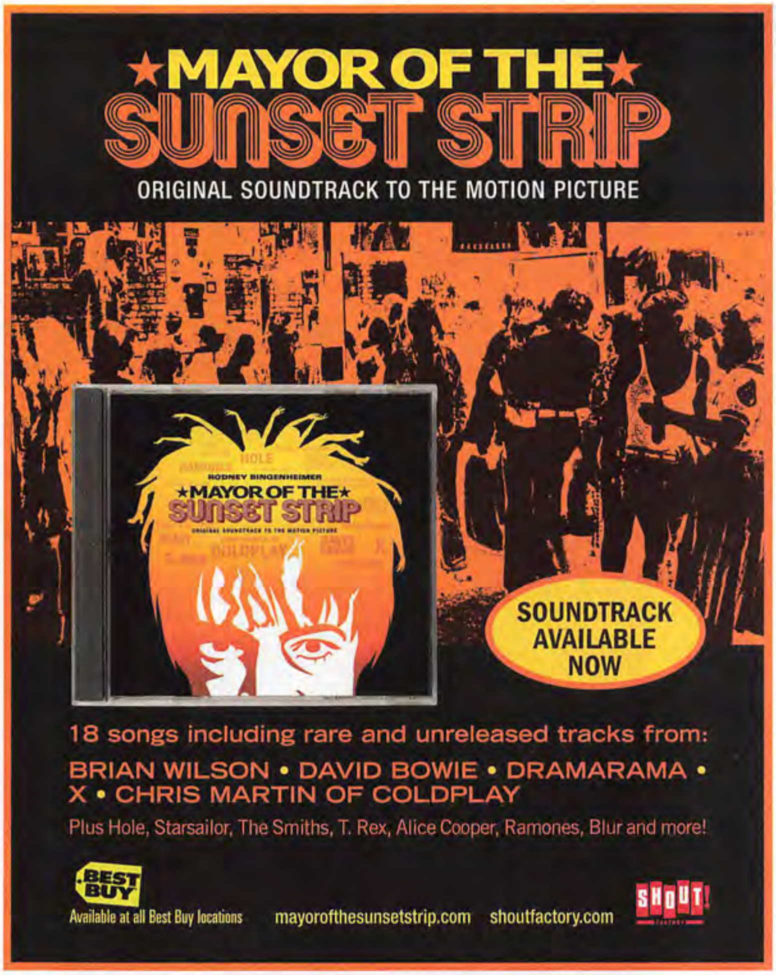
THE NASHVILLE ACOUSTIC SESSIONS ✪✪✪✪

CMH

Miami-born country dude does old tunes exactly right

Raul Malo, the lead singer of Nashville's country-rock Mavericks, can dig the past without deep-sixing the modern. It's a hard virtue to

From top: Glenn French; Steve Granitz/Retna Ltd.



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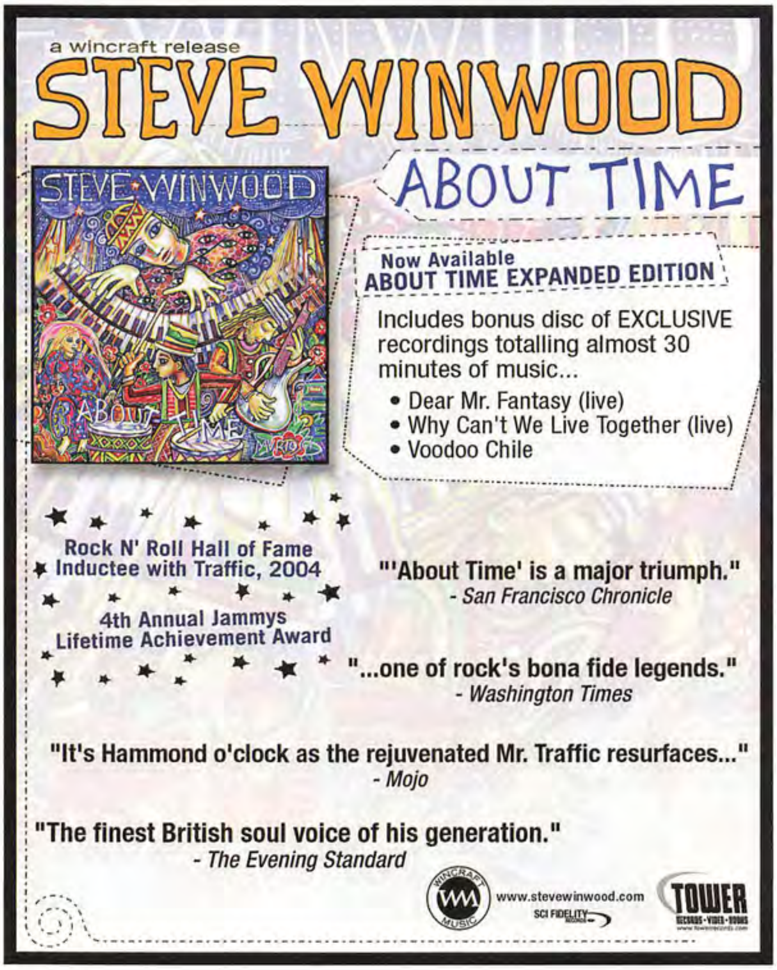

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TOWER

Only later did the Vines realize it wasn't that kind of grass.

FIELD TRIP

Australia's retro alt-rockers leave the tantrums behind

THE VINES

WINNING DAYS ✪✪✪

CAPITOL

>> HYPE CAN TURN around and bite a group quicker than you can say "the best band since Nirvana," but it wasn't excessive praise that threatened to derail the Vines after their impressive 2002 debut, *Highly Evolved*. It was their increasingly notorious live shows, particularly frontman Craig Nicholls's excruciating habit of pretending to have some kind of fit. By no stretch of the imagination, audiences concluded, was this guy the new Kurt Cobain.

Perhaps someone told Nicholls to tone down his scenery-chewing impersonation of a tortured rock star by, say, 90 percent. If so, that someone has done us all a great service, because the few times Nicholls lets rip on the Vines' new album, he sounds less like a man full of rage and torment than a purple-faced grade-schooler refusing to eat his vegetables. After "Fuck the World," the petulant squib that brings *Winning Days* to an anticlimax, you don't want to feel his pain; you just want to ground him.

Nicholls tones down his tortured-rock-star impersonation.

★

The preceding 35 minutes are mostly smooth sailing. Talking about the album, the Vines have name-checked the familiar touchstones of Nirvana, Britpop and the Beach Boys, allaying any fears of a radical swerve into Krautrock or crunk. Call it the Strokes Maneuver: follow your first album with more of the same, just slicker. There's something about the precision of the gear changes and the crisp efficiency of Rob Schnapf's production that hits the spot, however derivatively.

On "She's Got Something to Say," the Vines sound so much like the pre-acid Beatles that if you close your eyes, you can picture them wagging their moptopped heads. "Amnesia" is a heat haze of '60s harmonies and shimmering guitars. Best of all, "TV Pro" flips between soft-focus psychedelic refrains and the dumbest, catchiest chorus since Blur's "Song 2" was a hit.

That's the thing about the Vines. For all of Nicholls's efforts to prove otherwise, they're at root just a good-time rock & roll band, dispensing crunchy guitar-pop for the kids and retro shadings for their fathers and older brothers. If there are any hidden depths to them, they're extraordinarily well-concealed. *DORIAN LYNSKEY*

DOWNLOAD THESE "TV Pro," "Rainfall"

CRAIG NICHOLLS'S CURRENT LISTENING

- **GRAHAM COXON** **THE KISS OF MORNING** *TRANSCOPIC*
- **BASEMENT JAXX** **KISH KASH** *ASTRALWERKS*

account for. Yet on this fantastic acoustic album of standards from Van Morrison, Gordon Lightfoot, the Louvin Brothers, Johnny Mercer and others, Malo's light-as-air tenor isn't just a model of poise and coloration; especially given how acoustic technicians Flynn, Ickes and Pomeroy mirror Malo's grace, the singing shows how vintage songs can conjure more than memories. For Malo, the wordy, nervous hoedown of the Louvins' "The Great Atomic Power" is no less a compelling structure to illuminate than is Mercer's incalculably leaner, slower, more relaxed "Moon River" — in both, Malo goes for the gold. This is not an old-fashioned or curatorial viewpoint; instead, it's like noticing a touch of Shakespeare in a comic book.

JAMES HUNTER

DOWNLOAD THESE "Hot Burrito #1," "Bright Side of the Road," "The Great Atomic Power"

ASTONISHING FACT! >>

VINES bassist Patrick Matthews once cycled from Sydney, Australia, to Melbourne — a distance of 500 miles — in five days.

ANNE McCUE

ROLL ✪✪✪

MESSENGER

On solo U.S. debut, Aussie songwriter and Vietnam vet (sort of) mixes folk and Hendrix

Anne McCue is a folkie, but she's no delicate flower: Fresh off a tour with Louisiana growler Lucinda Williams, the Aussie singer-guitarist recently spent a year gigging five nights a week in Vietnam and boasts an arsenal of muscular Hendrix chords (the trippy, multi-tracked "Hangman"). The title song is a bluesy, tough-girl strut, but McCue is best when she's beating up on herself: Her warm, unpolished alto is all vulnerability on the stripped-down, remorseful "50 Dollar Whore," while she compares herself to Judas Iscariot, Hitler and Richard Nixon on "Gandhi." She's likely overestimating her sins a touch, although the way she rips off Sinéad O'Connor's vocal tics on the chorus *is* borderline criminal.

JOHN DeFORE

DOWNLOAD THESE "50 Dollar Whore," "Gandhi"

MODEST MOUSE

GOOD NEWS FOR PEOPLE WHO LOVE BAD NEWS ✪✪✪

EPIC

College-rock heroes make happy music for incurable depressives on their fifth album

Show Isaac Brock parking lots, pine trees or distant planets, and he'll show you human insignificance, cosmic unfairness: With this guy, it's not just the glass that's half-empty; it's the keg of Pabst, too. But he never gets too despondent; he's a depressive, but he won't let his romantic side go under for good. For 10 years, his Seattle trio has balanced majestic, wistful rambles with hooky indie-pop. On "Float On," both his moods swell. "We'll all float on, OK," Brock sings — it's equal parts cheer and sigh, a vision of bodies drifting, powerless against dumb luck. He's got a sweet lisp, a fantastic scream (see "Bury Me With It") and a fine eye ("The clouds just hung around, like black Cadillacs outside of a funeral"). He's adept at wringing out emotion while straddling sentimentality, but too often here, gauche studio affectations (string sections, multi-tracking, Saturn-commercial electronica) make his sap sound plain cheap.

JONAH WEINER

DOWNLOAD THESE "Float On," "Bury Me With It"

NOW IT'S OVERHEAD

FALL BACK OPEN ✪✪

SADDLE CREEK

Bright Eyes side project number 4,578 is a misfire

As producer and touring member of Omaha indie wunderkinder Bright Eyes, Andy LeMaster has done a fine job. Back home with his own group in Athens, Georgia, he shows off his studio chops: The layers of reverberating guitars and surround-sound harmonies here — a couple of them courtesy of guests Conor Oberst and Michael Stipe — can be dazzling, but the ponderous lyrics sound cribbed straight from *A Mighty Wind* ("There is not what I want in a mountain peak/There is not what I want in a valley deep"), and LeMaster's nasal whine is hard to take. It's a rare producer who's as interesting in front of the mic as behind the board; too bad LeMaster ain't that rare.

BEN SISARIO

DOWNLOAD THIS "Reverse"

ONELINEDRAWING

THE VOLUNTEERS ✪✪✪

JADE TREE

Former emo punk records bedroom laments and club sing-alongs

Like his diehard fan Chris Carrabba of Dashboard Confessional, Jonah Matranga doesn't front a band so much as take refuge behind a name. His dreamy, bittersweet ponderings of life's fuckups often consist of little more than an acoustic guitar, a cheap drum machine and his creaky croon. In the delicate, searing and very funny "Livin' Small," he savages "punk-rock pimps and ho's" who pursue stardom over "lovers and friends." *Awww.* But the best songs here brace his vulnerability with expansive flourishes: The punky "We

Stephen Oxenbury/Corbis Outline

Had a Deal" explodes into a howled refrain, and "Oh, Boys" floats pretty balladry over a skittering laptop beat. Even better, "Over It" culminates in a sample of live crowds shouting the chorus. Ever self-effacing, Matranga sounds overjoyed to be nearly drowned out.

NICK CATUCCI

DOWNLOAD THESE "Over It," "Livin' Small"

RAH DIGGA

EVERYTHING IS A STORY ✪✪✪

J RECORDS

Single mother and Busta Rhymes protégée makes her bid for the mainstream

Rah Digga isn't taking any chances. For her second album, Flipmode Squad's lone female MC recruited Megahertz, a producer who adeptly mimics radio's top hitmakers (he helmed Busta Rhymes's 2003 Neptunes-alike "We Gon' Do It to Ya"), and a half-dozen A-list guest spotters. Megahertz should pay Eminem and Dr. Dre royalties for the "My Name Is" photocopy "I'm Coming Back" — but Digga's dogged, urgent rhyme style resuscitates the weakest accompaniments here. Even clichéd hip-hop sentimentality — directed toward her daughter (the violin-soaked "Sativa") and deceased cousin (the spare, thumping "Miss You") — sounds fresh when she's spitting it. On the remix of the lead single, "Party & Bullshit," Missy Elliott rivals her intensity, burping and shrieking over a dramatic Just Blaze beat. Life is full of risks, Digga seems to be saying — why not settle for security?

NICK CATUCCI

DOWNLOAD THIS "Party & Bullshit"

I LOVE THIS CD!

ROB SCHNEIDER
ACTOR IN *50 FIRST DATES*

PANCHO SANCHEZ
OUT OF SIGHT!
CONCORD JAZZ

"He's playing rhythm-and-blues stuff. He's a great conga player. *Out of Sight!* is a great CD. Amazing sound."

LOU REED

ANIMAL SERENADE ✪✪✪✪

REPRISE

Rock's driest crank loosens up, embraces his legacy, (gasp!) pleases fans

Onstage last June, Lou Reed teasingly strummed the chords of his classic "Sweet Jane," then abruptly stopped. "So I thought I would explain to you how you make a career out of three chords," he croaked. "You younger bands, pay attention." Wait a second — was that a joke? About himself? *Animal,* Reed's fifth live album, is an uncharacteristic treat from this rock trickster. He reimagines newer songs such as "Ecstasy" and "Vanishing Act" with drummerless, cello-driven arrangements that nod to the work of his partner, Laurie Anderson; "The Day John Kennedy Died" segues into a searing "Street Hassle," as if to suggest that the violent end of the Great Society led directly to the urban decay of the '70s. Versions of the Velvet Underground's "Venus in Furs" and "Heroin" maintain an incendiary pathos. At 62, Reed apparently has indulged in the drug that rejuvenated Bob Dylan's career: enjoying himself.

KAREN SCHOEMER

DOWNLOAD THESE "Dirty Boulevard," "Street Hassle"

Lou Reed, prepared to fight if Hammer wants his jacket back

THE ROCKET SUMMER

CALENDAR DAYS ✪✪

THE MILITIA GROUP

An emo album so happy it features a gleeful chorus of 12-year-old girls. Insert shudder here

EMO GOES TO SESAME STREET!

Ah, to be young and in love . . . with being young. Such is the blissful existence of 21-year-old Dallas-based multi-instrumentalist Bryce Avary, who records under the name the Rocket Summer. On his first full-length album, Avary makes like a one-man Polyphonic Spree, tripping

From top: Sara DeBoer/Retna Ltd.; Timothy Greenfield Sanders

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The Von Bondies feel a strange craving for donuts, rubber bullets.

ON THE BEAT

Jack White's punching bag leads a garage-rock rave-up

THE VON BONDIES

PAWN SHOPPE HEART ✪✪✪✪

SIRE

SUCCESS IS WHEN everybody wants a piece of you. Congratulations, then, to the Von Bondies. As if putting out a major-label debut isn't enough of an attention-grabber, frontman Jason Stollsteimer cinched the deal by making like Von Gandhi last December when he crossed paths with his former mentor, Jack White. The White Stripe had once produced and championed the Von Bondies, but he allegedly started pounding on Stollsteimer, and — many red blood cells later — Stollsteimer filed police charges.

> The Von Bondies are good enough to make Jack White nervous. ★

If the feud doesn't tear Detroit apart, maybe *Pawn Shoppe Heart* will. Though not as ambitious or original as the Stripes at their best, the VBs' indelible punk-rock blues parks a new car in the Motor City garage.

"I'm a broken man/This is my broken band/From a broken land," Stollsteimer sings on "Broken Man," and everywhere else he keeps it that simple and direct. He's a bawling, blubbering wretch of a hoodoo man, down on his last good knee. Producer Jerry Harrison (Live, No Doubt) places Stollsteimer's voice in the front and gets the band to practice to the point of precision — yet also leaves the kinks in their gnarly three-minute tunes.

In the first single, "C'mon C'mon," Stollsteimer's stuck in complicated times, yearning for simple teenage kicks. "Been Swank" is a moaning tribute to Detroit rocker Ben Swank, of the Soledad Brothers; and just when Stollsteimer's gothic soul-storm vocals get a little over the top come a pair of songs sung by female guitarist Marcie Bolen. "You're not that social, you're just a good drinker," she sings approvingly on "Not That Social."

Hidden at the end is a cover of the Otis Redding soul classic "Try a Little Tenderness," with Stollsteimer channeling Screamin' Jay Hawkins. It's good enough to make Jack White nervous. *RJ SMITH*

DOWNLOAD THESE "C'mon C'mon," "Maireade," "Crawl Through Darkness"

JASON STOLLSTEIMER'S CURRENT LISTENING

- **RAZORLIGHT**
  RIP IT UP, PART 1 *MERCURY*
- **OTIS REDDING**
  OTIS! THE DEFINITIVE OTIS REDDING *RHINO*

a light-pop fandango across a Technicolor emo landscape. By turns charming (the peppy, sweet-natured "This Is Me"; the '70s AM gold of "Saturday") and nauseating (the thudding "What We Hate, We Make" — featuring a sixth-grade girls' choir!), *Calendar Days* demonstrates Avary's knack for a pop hook and his tendency to mistake sap for sentiment. Still, anyone encouraging bedroom-bound emo kids to turn their frowns upside down and run around under "Skies So Blue" is fine by us. This guy's the Big Bird of emo.
ANDY GREENWALD

DOWNLOAD THESE "Saturday," "TV Family"

SAMANTHA RONSON

RED ✪✪✪

ROC MUSIC

Roc-A-Fella strays from hip-hop to sign NYC socialite with a pop flair

Her brother Mark is one of New York's scenester DJs, her sister Charlotte is a fashion designer whom Jay-Z name-drops and her stepdad was in Foreigner. By all appearances, Samantha Ronson's debut on Roc-A-Fella's new non-rap imprint should be an exercise in indulgence and star-fuckery. But somehow, this novice collection of piano and guitar-pop isn't. Her thin voice is a liability, but she neatly skirts its limitations with a persona that's one part Debbie Harry, one part Vanessa Carlton — she's a tough girl sneering her way through poppy love songs — and simple, elegant melodies ("Pull My Hair Out," "Tomorrow Always Comes"). On "Cadillac," she noticeably fails to hit a high note after scratchily proclaiming, "If you don't give a fuck, just sing it/I don't care if you can't sing at all." Suck on that, Simon Cowell!
JON CARAMANICA

DOWNLOAD THESE "Pull My Hair Out," "Cigarettes"

RON SEXSMITH

RETRIEVER ✪✪✪✪

NETTWERK AMERICA

Canadian sensitive-guy songwriter dives headlong into pop, emerges with his best collection

Ron Sexsmith has a compassion problem. Since his extraordinary 1995 major-label debut, he's dispensed squishily sensitive homilies or observations — such as a moment on *Retriever* when in his quavery, quick-get-the-smelling-salts voice, he declares "I feel for the driver in the aftermath/Of a child who chased a ball across his path." The genius of Sexsmith's seventh and best work is the way he surrounds (or, depending on your perspective, atones for) the empathy overload with deftly assimilated, gloriously ascendant pop hookcraft. He pours gooey love-song sentiment into a starkly beautiful, McCartney-esque frame ("Tomorrow in Her Eyes") or surrounds weighty statements of personal and political resolve with intricate, Byrds-like acoustic guitar. Even when he veers outside his comfort zone — on the acidic rocker "Wishing Wells" or the silky Philly Soul send-up "Whatever It Takes" — his gift for understated, insinuating melody transforms what could easily be bathos into bittersweet music of unsurpassed grace.
TOM MOON

DOWNLOAD THESE "Imaginary Friends," "From Now On," "For the Driver"

SNOW PATROL

FINAL STRAW ✪✪✪✪

A&M

Irish rock quartet aims straight for your heartstrings

THE SCOTTISH COLDPLAY!

Formed back in 1994, Snow Patrol had something of an ignominious beginning, releasing two low-key, lo-fi albums that sold mostly to members of their immediate families. *Final Straw*, however, arrives here with plaudits from the U.K. — and California, in the shape of big fans Grandaddy. Produced by Garrett Lee, a man more at home working with TLC than British Bob Mould enthusiasts, this record shimmers with a newfound sophistication. Mostly, this is thanks to velvet-voiced singer Gary Lightbody, who invests so much wrought passion into the best songs here — "How to Be Dead," "Run" — that they're transformed into strength-sapping, lump-in-the-throat anthems. The last U.K. act to harness such emotion so successfully was Coldplay. Gwyneth Paltrow may have settled down too soon.
NICK DUERDEN

DOWNLOAD THESE "How to Be Dead," "Run," "Chocolate"

SQUAREPUSHER

ULTRAVISITOR ✪✪✪

WARP

André 3000's favorite electronic oddball mixes the ridiculous and the sublime

Thom Yorke, Sofia Coppola and André 3000 have all sung the praises of

I LOVE THIS CD!

MANDY MOORE
SINGER-ACTRESS IN *CHASING LIBERTY*

JOHN MAYER
ROOM FOR SQUARES
AWARE/COLUMBIA

"I love John Mayer. I have so many memories with this album."

From top: Michael Lavine; Grayson Alexander/Retna Ltd.

English maverick Tom Jenkinson, but which side of Squarepusher do they dig the most? The jazz-fusion fan, the ambient craftsman or the drum & bass extremist who sounds like he's trying to staple CDs to the inside of a tumble dryer? His fifth album skips restlessly among the three, and it's the percussive assaults that end up achieving the least. Since 1995, Jenkinson's been treating his laptop the way death-metal bands treat their guitars, and it's no longer radical, just annoying. But it's when the onslaught of clatters and clicks, bangs and *brrraps* gives way to the plangent elegance of "Iambic 9 Poetry" or the tongue-twisting Cockney rap of "50 Cycles" that Squarepusher really lives up to his reputation.

DORIAN LYNSKEY

DOWNLOAD THESE "Iambic 9 Poetry," "Circlewave"

START TROUBLE

EVERY SOLUTION HAS ITS PROBLEM ✪✪

COLUMBIA

Jacksonville, Florida, pop-punk foursome go to the Andrew W.K. School of 24-Hour Partying, flunk out

Start Trouble, who were discovered by Matt Pinfield, sound like some miserable dudes, judging from their album title and lyrics like "Every day I live this fantasy of never waking up." But look a bit closer and you'll find these boys just want to party — or, as frontman Luke "Don't Call Me 'Sky'" Walker rap-sings, "Let's get fucked up," "I wanna fuck nonstop" and so on. And that "never waking up" line? It's just about telling your boss to shove it and staying in bed all day with a warm PlayStation. It's fun for a song or two — especially "Chemical," a *TRL*-ready party anthem with a shout-along chorus ("Love is a chemical/Straight from your genitals"). But soon, their "fun" turns manic and mannered. And that's when the real trouble starts.

JOSH EELLS

DOWNLOAD THIS "Chemical"

SWEETBACK

STAGE 2 ✪✪✪

EPIC

Sade's designer-clad band gets heavy, gives work to a man named "Chocolate Genius"

In 1984, the awesome English-Nigerian singer Sade put together a dead-classic debut with her superstylish trio, led by guitarist-saxophonist Stuart Matthewman. Superstylishness, in fact, subsequently became the name of the game, from Soul II Soul to Massive Attack to Tricky to Craig David to earthy-outré points beyond. Sweetback, the name Sade's band took in 1996 when they recorded their cool-beat debut, comes to reclaim the mantle on this strikingly played, self-produced follow-up. Working with two distressed voices — that of Aya, a novice, and Chocolate Genius, an downtown-NYC R&B nonconformist — Sweetback don't quite unseat Massive Attack on a slow, gothy, grandly constructed piece such as "Circles," and on "Love Is the Word" and "All My Days With You," they show more flair for, uh, sweet. They wrestle ambitiously with the dark and the light, and on "Things You Never Know," they leap into very limber rock. All of it will please Brit-soul-aholics.

JAMES HUNTER

DOWNLOAD THESE "Love Is the Word," "Circles"

Tears for Fears: "You know, maybe this wine club is *too* exclusive."

Zoren Gold (Tears for Fears)

TEARS FOR FEARS

EVERYBODY LOVES A HAPPY ENDING ✪

ARISTA

Pretentious British duo ruins our fond remembrances by reuniting

Tears for Fears twosome Roland Orzabal and Curt Smith split up after making *The Seeds of Love* in 1989 because they couldn't stand the sight of each other. They should have followed their instincts: This reunion album is a misbegotten mess. Where Orzabal's pompous pronouncements about inner torment and the Human Condition once came with bounding New Wave hooks, they've now doubled their self-seriousness, dressing mediocre songs in shopworn Beatlesque flourishes, from baroque counter-melodies to psychedelic distortion. Instead of sounding clever, it comes off as dreary and dated. The title track, for instance, resembles stale XTC with a pukey Paul McCartney coda tacked on. "Who You Are" sounds like a Brian Wilson demo played on a crazy underwater calliope. In other words, it's way warped. Sorry, fellas, but nobody loves a sad reprise.

DAVID HILTBRAND

DOWNLOAD THESE None

ASTONISHING FACT! >>

START TROUBLE singer Luke Walker is a karate black belt. A tournament once booted him for jabbing a foe in the mouth. Dirty!

CARL THOMAS

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT ✪✪✪

BAD BOY/UNIVERSAL

Second album from R&B everyman

Unadorned and unpretentious, Carl Thomas is a far cry from the grand-standing and sashaying such artists as R. Kelly and Usher brought to contemporary R&B. What he forsakes in glamour and marketability, he compensates for with affecting everyman anguish, as demonstrated on 2001's lovesick smash "I Wish." The best songs here are cut from the same cloth — they're sentimental, but muscular, too: "Anything" sets his yearning tenor to "Shaft"-like hi-hats and wah-wah; the Just Blaze–produced "My First Love" pairs him with a sample of Jimmy Spicer's old-school staple "Money (Dollar Bill, Y'all)"; "Make It Alright" is admirably Isleys-ish. Thomas would do well to cut down on the more fawning ballads ("All My Love"), but at least his romance fixation doesn't feel especially forced. No matter how much he goes on about his heart, you still feel that he's listening to it.

CHAIRMAN MAO

DOWNLOAD THESE "Anything," "My First Love"

TOOTS & THE MAYTALS

TRUE LOVE ✪✪✪

V2

Rock-steady veteran remakes his old hits as A-list duets

Toots Hibbert provided the '60s bridge between Jamaican pop and American soul. Thirty-five years after he named an entire genre with "Do the Reggay," he's following Frank Sinatra's example and rerecording his famous songs, this time with star guests: Jeff Beck squirts lead guitar onto "54-46 Was My Number," and No Doubt's backing on "Monkey Man" neatly demonstrates the distance between first- and third-wave ska. Hibbert's raspy voice hasn't changed a bit, and aside from Shaggy (who attempts to hijack "Bam Bam"), his guests (including Ryan Adams, Eric Clapton and Keith Richards) respect his immaculate melodies. But he has recorded better versions of every one of these songs before — except for "Still Is Still Moving to Me," cleverly mutated here from the original by Willie Nelson.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD THESE "Monkey Man," "Sweet and Dandy"

BLENDER APPROVED

The best NEW RELEASES of the last three months

Norah Jones
feels like home

NORAH JONES

FEELS LIKE HOME

BLUE NOTE

The queen of brunch music's second album is a sensual yawn — a little friskier than the first, but just as resolutely, idyllically laid-back.

ROBBERS ON HIGH STREET

FINE LINES

SCRATCHIE/NEW LINE

A debut EP big enough to get lost in: From NYC (duh), this foursome makes superbly ragged retro-rock.

Nellie McKay

NELLIE McKAY

GET AWAY FROM ME

COLUMBIA

This NYC teen has a theater major's heart, stretching a hyperliterate sneer across a debut that melds Doris Day, hip-hop and Gilbert & Sullivan.

SOUNDTRACK
BARBERSHOP 2
BACK IN BUSINESS

VARIOUS ARTISTS

BARBERSHOP 2 SOUNDTRACK

INTERSCOPE

Clipse taunt wimps ("Pussy"), Sleepy Brown and Outkast get seductive ("I Can't Wait") and G-Unit get romantic (kinda) on this A-list soundtrack.

TONY TOUCH

THE PIECE MAKER II ✪✪✪

KOCH

Mix-tape DJ/MC throws a Puerto Rican parade; Fat Joe, Sean Paul, Method Man and others ride floats

If a rapper brags about riding "twin Porsches," he's probably exaggerating; when it's Fat Joe, however, he might actually need the extra room. This compilation, from New York mix-tape vet Tony Touch, throws a bunch of new twists into common hip-hop tropes. On the fantastically narrated "Trouble on the Westside Highway," Slick Rick doesn't blast back when gunmen demolish his Range Rover — he wonders if he was impolite to them and pleads for police. Throughout, black and Puerto Rican rap cultures mix ("Put my cornbread and greens with your rice and beans," dead prez's Stic.man rhymes); Touch rolls his *r*'s with relish ("We don't give a *frrruck!*") and works Latin inflections into his spare beats. His A-list guests pop some great lines, but indie Q-Unique's are funniest: After promising to "bring crowds out like no-tax week," he tells a rival, "You dumbin' out like Jeff Daniels and Jim Carrey/My voice box vary and smack you like Moe, Curly and Larry." Nyuk-nyuk-nyuk.

JONAH WEINER

DOWNLOAD THESE Q-Unique, "Spit 1"

Can you guess which member of TV on the Radio has a fear of barbers?

Ludis Mergins

TV ON THE RADIO

DESPERATE YOUTH, BLOOD THIRSTY BABES ✪✪✪✪

TOUCH AND GO

Difficult, studio-obsessed debut from NYC art-dance upstarts

New York coolsters who flesh out grooves with jittery guitar blurts, low-end buzz and the occasional horn section, this loop-lovin' trio would be pretty neat if they played only instrumentals. But their secret weapon is Tunde Adebimpe's awesomely flexible voice — more than a little like Peter Gabriel's — usually overdubbed into a choir of whooping falsettos and rumbling purrs ("Ambulance" is a dazzling, doo-wop legion of a cappella Adebimpes). His lyrics can get stilted (the reggae-fied "Bomb Yourself" curiously links the Iraq war with Final Fantasy), but his singing is consistently riveting, and the oddball mix gives it room to flourish.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD THESE "Poppy," "Dreams"

VARIOUS ARTISTS

IN THE NAME OF LOVE: ARTISTS UNITED FOR AFRICA ✪✪

SPARROW

Altruistic Christian rock bands cover U2 very, very badly — but do it for a good cause!

This compilation of U2 covers by obscure Christian rock bands, which benefits Africans with AIDS, emphasizes Bono's religious sentiment and benevolent egotism at the cost of practically everything appealing about his band. The Edge's fleet, inventive guitar parts suffer mightily: Pillar's nü-metal "Sunday Bloody Sunday" sounds as flat and stiff as a manhole cover, while Bush wannabes Sanctus Real dress "Beautiful Day" in fuzzy grunge tatters. Others crank Bono's shooting-for-the-rafters bombast to 11, erasing the ever-present hint of sadness from his strut (Tait, "One"; Todd Agnew, "When Love Comes to Town"). Only Jesus-rock stalwarts Jars of Clay, who contribute a gentle, bluesy "All I Want Is You," honor U2's restless spirit. Otherwise, this is blind faith of the worst sort.

NICK CATUCCI

DOWNLOAD THESE None

GREATEST HITS
GUNS N ROSES
IN STORES NOW!
GEFFEN

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VOODOO CHILD

BABY MONKEY ✪✪✪

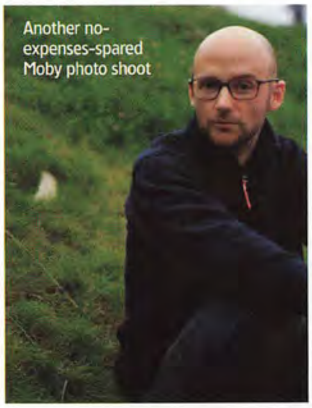
V2

Moby adopts pseudonym, ditches chill-out for techno roots

Moby has been accused of selling out, was dissed by Eminem and was then assaulted in Boston, apparently by followers of the rapper, so it's unsurprising that the techno he heard in clubs while touring Europe was so appealing it prompted these covert recordings: Techno producers are anonymous figures who can walk the streets without rogue b-boys beating them up. His attempt to mimic the "hard, sexy, straightforward" sound is most successful when he gets it wrong: "Obscure" and the Kraftwerk-y "Electronics" are both more melodic and more interesting than most dance-floor techno, while "Gotta Be Loose in Your Mind" revolves around a *Play*-like ancient-soul vocal. The more straightforward "Unh Yeah" and "Last" drag a bit, but as self-indulgent side projects go, this could be a whole lot worse.

JAMES SLAUGHTER

DOWNLOAD THESE "Gotta Be Loose in Your Mind"


Another no-expenses-spared Moby photo shoot

From left: Bernd Ott/Camera Press/Retna Ltd.; John Spellman/Retna Ltd.

ZERO 7

WHEN IT FALLS ✪✪✪

QUANGO/PALM

Surprisingly uneasy listening from Radiohead-approved chill-out duo

Zero 7 first buzzed hipster antennae by remixing Radiohead's "Climbing Up the Walls" into spooky trip-hop — thank their buddy, 'head producer Nigel Godrich, for the hook-up. Then came 2001's surprise sleeper debut, *2001 Simple Things*, which cold-fused sexy electronica with rare-groove vibes — think Air with less pretension and more soul-boy obsession. Here, the U.K. duo dip into the same pretty palette of jazzy Fender Rhodes tinkles, moody Moogs and silicone-soul vocals, but mix in some darker hues, too. The more abstract atmospherics evoke natty Burt Bacharach arrangements, stretched out like psychedelic taffy. They even turn their eyes toward folkie Americana soft-rock: The best song, "In Time," would sound great sung by Karen Carpenter — and that's a compliment. For computer music, it's all astoundingly warm: enveloping and luxe, like an orgasmatron set on simmer. These songs could melt an android's heart.

MATT DIEHL

DOWNLOAD THESE "In Time," "Home"

I LOVE THIS CD!

DREW BARRYMORE
ACTRESS IN *50 FIRST DATES*

BEYONCÉ
DANGEROUSLY IN LOVE
COLUMBIA

"That song 'Crazy in Love' — I can play it over and over again. I love it."

Z MAN

DOPE OR DOG FOOD ✪✪✪

REFILL/HIERO IMPERIUM

California indie MC hates meat, calls himself ugly and wants to know where the white women at!

A dreadlocked vegetarian rapper from San Francisco? Sounds like a surefire recipe for politically correct polemics (just add tofu and flax seeds!), but on his debut, the booze-loving Z Man doesn't pigeonhole that easily. One moment he's using his pliant, nasally voice to praise pale booty ("White Girls With Ass"); the next he shifts gears and disses none other than the Almighty ("God Is Watching"). But even when Z Man gets serious, he doesn't take himself too seriously. "Born po', eating cornbread on my birthday/Couldn't afford a real cake," he raps over a metronomic beat on "Free Spirited." Eventually, a pumped-up, martial chorus kicks in: "Born free! Hungry! Ugly with no money!" It's not exactly the kind of sentiment you go triple-platinum on, but it's the stuff beloved cult stars are made of.

G. BEATO

DOWNLOAD THESE "Free Spirited," "Lightening Inna Bottle"

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WEEK ENDING SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 29

THE 40 MOST POPULAR SONGS IN AMERICA

→ Jackette lands this month's breast-ranked — er, *best*-ranked song, beating back Usher and Norah Jones

Who wants to see the left one?

1 JANET JACKSON

"JUST A LITTLE WHILE"

DAMITA JO

Her flashed nipple beat out 9/11 as the Internet's most searched-for event ever — and boosted radio play around this new single. All of which might help her eighth album outsell 2001's double-platinum *All for You*. This summer she'll kick off a world tour, and she's set to star as '50s jazz singer and civil-rights activist Lena Horne in the ABC TV movie *Lena*.

HOW WE DID IT

The Most Popular Songs chart is based on radio and video airplay and album sales. Provided by HITSDailyDouble.com: "Proof that any idiot in the music business can have a Web site."

POSITION	TITLE	ARTIST	ALBUM/LABEL
1	"JUST A LITTLE WHILE"	JANET JACKSON	*DAMITA JO* VIRGIN
2	"YEAH!"	USHER FEAT. LUDACRIS AND LIL JON	*CONFESSIONS* ARISTA
3	"SUNRISE"	NORAH JONES	*FEELS LIKE HOME* BLUE NOTE
4	"ONE CALL AWAY"	CHINGY FEAT. JASON WEAVER	*JACKPOT* DISTURBING THA PEACE/CAPITOL
5	"COME CLEAN"	HILARY DUFF	*METAMORPHOSIS* BUENA VISTA/HOLLYWOOD
6	"TOXIC"	BRITNEY SPEARS	*IN THE ZONE* JIVE
7	"TIPSY"	J-KWON	*HOOD HOP* SO SO DEF/ARISTA
8	"SHE WANTS TO MOVE"	N'E'R'D'	*FLY OR DIE* VIRGIN
9	"MEGALOMANIAC"	INCUBUS	*A CROW LEFT OF THE MURDER* EPIC
10	"ROSES"	OUTKAST	*SPEAKERBOXXX/ THE LOVE BELOW* ARISTA
11	"LIBERATE"	DISTURBED	*BELIEVE* REPRISE
12	"IT'S MY LIFE"	NO DOUBT	*THE SINGLES 1992–2003* INTERSCOPE
13	"THIS LOVE"	MAROON 5	*SONGS ABOUT JANE* OCTONE/J RECORDS
14	"F**K IT"	EAMON	*I DON'T WANT YOU BACK* JIVE
15	"I BELIEVE IN A THING CALLED LOVE"	THE DARKNESS	*PERMISSION TO LAND* ATLANTIC
16	"THE REASON"	HOOBASTANK	*THE REASON* ISLAND
17	"SLOW JAMZ"	TWISTA	*KAMIKAZE* ATLANTIC
18	"MY IMMORTAL"	EVANESCENCE	*FALLEN* WIND-UP
19	"WANNA GET 2 KNOW U"	G-UNIT	*BEG FOR MERCY* G-UNIT/INTERSCOPE
20	"THE FIRST CUT IS THE DEEPEST"	SHERYL CROW	*THE VERY BEST OF SHERYL CROW* A&M
21	"HEY YA!"	OUTKAST	*SPEAKERBOXXX/ THE LOVE BELOW* ARISTA
22	"DIRT OFF YOUR SHOULDER"	JAY-Z	*THE BLACK ALBUM* ROC-A-FELLA/DEF JAM
23	"ARE YOU GONNA BE MY GIRL"	JET	*GET BORN* ELEKTRA
24	"SOMEDAY"	NICKELBACK	*THE LONG ROAD* ROADRUNNER
25	"RUBBER BAND MAN"	T.I.	*TRAP MUZIK* GRAND HUSTLE/ATLANTIC
26	"I MISS YOU"	BLINK-182	*BLINK-182* GEFFEN
27	"YOU AND I BOTH"	JASON MRAZ	*WAITING FOR MY ROCKET TO COME* ELEKTRA
28	"WITH YOU"	JESSICA SIMPSON	*IN THIS SKIN* COLUMBIA
29	"I LIKE THE WAY YOU MOVE"	OUTKAST	*SPEAKERBOXXX/ THE LOVE BELOW* ARISTA
30	"NUMB"	LINKIN PARK	*METEORA* WARNER BROS.
31	"FELL IN LOVE WITH A BOY"	JOSS STONE	*THE SOUL SESSIONS* S-CURVE
32	"COLD HARD BITCH"	JET	*GET BORN* ELEKTRA
33	"LOVE'S DIVINE"	SEAL	*SEAL IV* WARNER BROS.
34	"FALLS ON ME"	FUEL	*NATURAL SELECTION* EPIC
35	"HERE WITHOUT YOU"	3 DOORS DOWN	*AWAY FROM THE SUN* REPUBLIC/UNIVERSAL
36	"SLOW"	KYLIE MINOGUE	*BODY LANGUAGE* CAPITOL
37	"100 YEARS"	FIVE FOR FIGHTING	*THE BATTLE FOR EVERYTHING* AWARE/COLUMBIA
38	"ECHO"	TRAPT	*TRAPT* WARNER BROS.
39	"GIGOLO"	NICK CANNON	*NICK CANNON* JIVE
40	"SORRY 2004"	RUBEN STUDDARD	*SOULFUL* J RECORDS

2 USHER FEAT. LUDACRIS AND LIL JON

"YEAH!"

CONFESSIONS

Holy crunk makeover! On his fifth studio CD, Usher downplays devotional ballads for dirrtier number like this — and hey, what loverman doesn't like it rough sometimes? The R&B dandy hits *Regis and Kelly* on March 24 and *Good Morning America* the next day, and he'll prompt much 15-year-old drool spillage when the May issue of *Teen People* spotlights him.

3 NORAH JONES

"SUNRISE"

FEELS LIKE HOME

The album title might well be referring to the *Billboard* pop charts — where Jones's debut has enjoyed an undisturbed roost for 100 (!) weeks and counting. Here, the Grammy princess seeks to prolong her stay, and invites Dolly Parton and the Band's Levon Helm. This month she'll get mellow with Conan, then head to the U.K.

15 THE DARKNESS

"I BELIEVE IN A THING CALLED LOVE"

PERMISSION TO LAND

Unitards! Bare chests! Castrato howls! No, it's not a night at Elton John's house, silly, it's the new love jam from these British AquaNet fiends. Up until now, Yanks haven't had much of a chance to raise their lighters at a Darkness show, but on March 26, the boys finally kick off their first American tour.

17 TWISTA

"SLOW JAMZ"

KAMIKAZE

The onetime *Guinness Book of World Records*–certified fastest rapper alive took everyone by surprise when he sped to a number 1 album debut. This single features another up-and-comer, Kanye West, who produced the Anita Baker–worshipping track. In April, Twista hits the road with Dirty Southerner T.I.

Andrew McPherson (Jackson); Anthony Mandler (Usher); Clay Patrick McBride (Jones); Pat Ford (the Darkness); Vincent Soyez (Twista)

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Only one of these two is housebroken.

"I'm a Coward By Nature!"

So claims **Johnny Knoxville**, the 32-year-old Jackass-turned-actor. If that wasn't enough, he says Johnny Cash makes him cry, and he runs like Judy Garland! Has Knoxville gone soft?

BY ADAM HIGGINBOTHAM
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LEGO

JOHNNY KNOXVILLE took a trip last summer to the Florida Everglades with his friend Manny Puig. Puig is an alligator expert; Knoxville is not. So when Puig decided to film Knoxville being chased by a gator they found basking by the road, events took a predictable turn.

"It takes off running at me, and there's this cameraman who's about six-foot-four. My hands go up like Judy Garland's — *'Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!'* — I turn around, knock him over and put my footprint in his chest to get away. I'm a coward by nature," Knoxville says, sitting in a dark bar on Manhattan's Lower East Side. "Which kind of makes it funnier."

The *Jackass* star has parlayed a global reputation for savage personal injury into a proper acting career. He's starring in the new John Waters movie and the next Farrelly Brothers film, and he plays Gram Parsons's corpse-stealing manager, Phil Kaufman, in the upcoming *Grand Theft Parsons.*

The music-obsessed Knoxville has now launched his own record label. So far, Johnny Knoxville Records has only one signee: his first cousin, Roger Alan Wade. And it's his album Knoxville puts on the bar stereo as he gets his picture taken and helps himself to a few beers.

By the time he's ready to talk about his record collection, Knoxville has lined up an impressive row of empty Pabst Blue Ribbon cans on the bar. It's only 2 in the afternoon. How long has he been drinking, exactly? "Pretty much since the beginning of the second Reagan administration," he says. "Straight through."

ROGER ALAN WADE
GREATEST HITS

ROGER ALAN WADE

GREATEST HITS

JOHNNY KNOXVILLE/MELEE, 2004

"Roger's my first cousin. He's written for George Jones, Waylon Jennings and Johnny Cash. When I was 14, I was sitting in some joint he was playing, and he snuck me a beer and gave me a copy of Kerouac's *On the Road.* And I just wanted to leave home instantly. Roger has really inspired me."

N.W.A
STRAIGHT OUTTA COMPTON

N.W.A

STRAIGHT OUTTA COMPTON

RUTHLESS/PRIORITY, 1988

"I'd never heard anything like N.W.A before. I was 16. It blew the fuckin' top off my head. I was living in south Knoxville, Tennessee, a mostly white Southern city. I remember drinking black-label beer and taking Valiums, riding around, getting drunk in high school, listening to N.W.A."

THE BEATLES

RUBBER SOUL

CAPITOL, 1965

"My friend Brian told me 'Run for Your Life' is still outlawed in Canada, because — 'Better run for your life if you can, little girl' — it's all about shooting a girl. I have an 8-year old daughter, and it used to be her favorite song — she'd sing along with it. She was little; she didn't know. She also used to sing along to *Sandinista!* by the Clash."

RAMONES

RAMONES

SIRE, 1976

"I was 22, dirt-poor, living in a studio apartment in L.A., and my friends Bernie and Loomis turned me on to the Ramones. We'd go to bars at night, and Loomis would get a half-pint of Captain Morgan and I'd get a half-pint of tequila. We'd order one drink, refill it all night long — and then go home and listen to the Ramones."

david bowie
hunky dory

DAVID BOWIE

HUNKY DORY

VIRGIN, 1971

"This was the first Bowie album I got, and I listened to it over and over. I was in my mid-twenties, living in the Hollywood Hills, writing for skateboard magazines like *Big Brother.* They were the only ones that would let me do an article on self-defense equipment. The best thing about Bowie, and the Beatles, are the non-hits."

JOHNNY CASH
AT FOLSOM PRISON

JOHNNY CASH

AT FOLSOM PRISON

COLUMBIA/LEGACY, 1968

"He's a national treasure back home. I bought a cabin of his in Tennessee. I called his brother, and they already had an offer in. I was begging — you know, 'Please, I'm a Tennessee boy!' I got my eyes all teared up — that's how I feel about Johnny. I bought it sight unseen. He signed the papers on Monday, and he died on Friday."

T.REX

THE SLIDER

REPERTOIRE, 1972

"This reminds me of traveling with the *Jackass* guys through the Pacific Northwest. We shot a lot of stuff up there — the car-rental return; when Dave ate the pee Sno-Kone and threw up. . . . Happy thoughts. Getting drunk, stumbling around Portland listening to *The Slider.* That was our job. Never take a job you can't get loaded on."

Tim
THE REPLACEMENTS

THE REPLACEMENTS

TIM

WARNER BROS., 1985

"The Replacements were either the greatest or the worst band you ever saw. They played this bar in Texas, and it was all cowboys and punkers. For the first part of the show, they played all punker songs, and the cowboys left. When the punkers were left, they played cowboy songs. They just wanted to piss people off."

Memorial Album
Johnny Ace

JOHNNY ACE

MEMORIAL ALBUM

ACE, 1956

"I love Johnny Ace so much. He was playing Russian roulette backstage on Christmas Eve in 1954, and he blew his brains out. On the table beside him was a song called 'Pledging My Love' — the sweetest song you've ever heard. I love buying music for people, stuff they might not know, and I always buy Johnny Ace."

WILLIE NELSON
RED HEADED STRANGER

WILLIE NELSON

RED HEADED STRANGER

COLUMBIA/LEGACY, 1975

"I've been shooting this Farrelly Brothers picture and listening to a lot of Willie. This was his first concept album. I was talking to one of his cousins on the set in Texas, and he said that when Willie played it for his family, they were like, 'No one's gonna like this!' But it was his stroke of genius."

AND MORE . . .

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Grooming: Sacha Harlord for Aartist Loft. Shot on location at Welcome to the Johnsons, New York.

On the Good Foot

The greatest live album of all time . . . now even greater

JAMES BROWN
LIVE AT THE APOLLO
★★★★★
UNIVERSAL

STEREO
THE APOLLO THEATRE
THE JAMES BROWN SHOW
JAMES BROWN
VIVID SOUND

THE MUG SHOT of James Brown that appeared in January following his arrest for domestic violence revealed a sad-eyed, wild-haired, bewildered old man (see page 38). Comedians mocked him. Tabloids paraded the photo as evidence of another celebrity run amok. For many young music fans, Brown is little more than a figure of fun, a crazy old coot, a morning-drive punch line.

But for those who love and understand his contribution to American music, Brown isn't, and never will be, a joke. Born poor in the segregated pre–Civil Rights South, this Augusta, Georgia, native danced in the streets for money and did jail time for petty crime. But once he matched his powerful church-trained voice to the crowd-pleasing dance moves he developed in the street, Brown emerged in the late 1950s as a force in black music.

Unlike the disheveled perp peering out from tabloid front pages, the young Brown was a well-groomed showman who kept himself in immaculate shape and ran his band with military precision. Musicians who missed cues or flubbed notes were fined. His employees didn't call him James; he was "Mr. Brown" to almost everyone in his orbit.

Hip-hop musicians, especially, value Brown's enormous musical contributions. His R&B and funk recordings from the late '60s and early '70s have been sampled by virtually every important rap artist, from old-school icons Public Enemy to gangstas N.W.A right up to the slick, MTV-ready rhymes of P. Diddy. It's not an overstatement to say that Brown's recordings were the rhythmic blueprint for hip-hop.

James Brown wins "funkiest Count Dracula costume." Again.

But back in 1962, he wasn't yet an icon; he was an eager R&B up-and-comer trying to carve out an identity in a crowded, talented marketplace. His main rivals were the crooner Sam Cooke, who looked like Denzel Washington and sang like an angel, and Jackie Wilson, who had an operatic tenor and slick, hip-shaking dance steps. Though both Cooke and Wilson were charismatic, handsome entertainers, neither could top Brown, his three singer-dancers, the Famous Flames, or his 12-piece band when it came to putting on a show. To separate himself from his competitors, Brown proposed a bold move: to record a live album at the most important black-music venue in the country, Harlem's Apollo Theater.

His label, King Records, resisted. There had been few live albums by R&B singers. Moreover, the label's owner, Syd Nathan, didn't believe Brown could generate any singles from a concert record. Bucking conventional wisdom, Brown forced King to record his midnight show on October 24, 1962, a decision that turned Brown from just another R&B star into a legend. The LP stayed on the pop album charts for 66 weeks and reached number 2 in an era when hardcore R&B never crossed over to white audiences. Afterward, fans crowned Brown "the hardest-working man in show business," one of the many affectionate nicknames he would earn as he grew into an institution inseparable not just from black music but from the very struggles and triumphs of his people.

James Brown and the Famous Flames at the Apollo Theater, 1964

The Apollo show is both raw and cooked, with Brown's gritty, guttural vocals backed by razor-sharp horns and an agile, precise rhythm section. In contrast to the pioneering funk records he would make later in the decade, this 40-minute set is filled with pleading ballads ("Try Me," "I'll Go Crazy," "I Don't Mind") that have Brown begging for love, sex, forgiveness, you name it. This isn't sweet soul, but tough, aching, reckless music.

His band became nearly as influential as Brown himself. Seven horns (three trumpets, three

Don Paulsen/Michael Ochs Archives (2)

saxophones, one trombone) add punch and poetry. Some of the arrangements by musical director Louis Hamblin echo the big-band past, while others suggest the more percussive soul-horn style still a few years in the future. Two drummers are featured, Clayton Fillyau and Sam Latham, an arrangement as unusual then as it is now. The group is as well-drilled as a Marine platoon, discipline that's particularly evident in the lightning transitions from song to song during a mid-set medley. Perhaps in fear of reprimand or unemployment, this band plays as one under the boss's barked commands.

Brown's record label didn't want him to make a live album. ★

It's an approach the Apollo audience adored. The voices of the 1,500 or so fans in attendance are as prominent in the mix as Fillyau's snare drum. The screams of pleasure and shouts of encouragement flow in and out of songs as if part of the choruses. But unlike, say, Beatles fans of the same period, the Apollo crowd doesn't drown Brown out but participates in a call-and-response with him. This intense love affair between Brown and the black community is what later earned him the title "Godfather of Soul."

Years after the actual show, several singles were culled from this recording ("Lost Someone," "I'll Go Crazy") and played on radio, defying all the doubters. Those edited songs are included here as bonus tracks, making this release the most comprehensive document of that electric night in 1962. Many have called *Live at the Apollo* the greatest concert album of all time. True or not, this reissue makes the case for Brown as an extraordinarily passionate talent, rightfully aware of his own greatness. If you know only the mug shot, then you don't know James Brown. NELSON GEORGE

DOWNLOAD THESE "Try Me," "Night Train," "Lost Someone"

10,000 MANIACS

CAMPFIRE SONGS: THE POPULAR, OBSCURE & UNKNOWN RECORDINGS ✪✪✪

ELEKTRA/RHINO

Lofty folk-rockers declare: War, child abuse and illiteracy are bad. Right on!

In the '80s, this Jamestown, New York, quintet copied no one. "We called the music we made 'proletariat,' " singer Natalie Merchant pretends in the liner notes, but understand this: 10,000 Maniacs rank among the least aw-shucks of bands, flinging their mandolins and left-wing politics like expensive scarves. The hits "What's the Matter Here?" and "Trouble Me," as well as album tracks along the well-written lines of "You Happy Puppet," are generously melodic. They profit further from Merchant's highly affected alto, an original instrument of screen-door textures and slippery rhythms. Covers — as well as demos, on the second disc — abound: a spot-on resurrection (with Michael Stipe) of Lulu's old '60s beauty "To Sir With Love"; a godawful 1993 hit version of Patti Smith's "Because the Night." The vibe throughout remains high-minded yet ultra-cozy.

JAMES HUNTER

DOWNLOAD THESE "You Happy Puppet," "Trouble Me"

THE SCORE »

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GOOD IN ITS GENRE

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JUST OK

✪
WEAK

CHEAP TRICK

THE ESSENTIAL CHEAP TRICK ✪✪✪

EPIC/LEGACY

Two CDs of landmark power-pop from ugly/beautiful Midwesterners

Cheap Trick's Rick Nielsen drops his cigar.

Does it keep guitarist Rick Nielsen awake at night to hear Cheap Trick's punk power chord/pop chorus formula hijacked by younger bands in the twenty-first century? Or does he take an avuncular view of Good Charlotte and Sum 41, knowing that he grabbed all *his* best ideas from the Beatles and the Who anyway? With 36 songs on this set, most of them funny, weird, perverse, fast or several of the above, the band's many acolytes are spoiled for choice. By 1986, Cheap Trick were hiring MOR ballad writers to bail them out of the commercial doldrums. Before that, on a run of homegrown career highs — "Surrender," "Voices" and "Way of the World," all included here — nobody else did power-pop to such perfection. They're all worth ripping off, if they haven't been already.

DANIEL KRAUSS

DOWNLOAD THESE "Surrender," "Gonna Raise Hell"

THE DOORS

BOOT YER BUTT! THE DOORS BOOTLEGS ✪✪

RHINO HANDMADE

Endless, poorly recorded collection fails to capture the riot-starting potential of L.A.'s first rebel band

HE'S HOT! HE'S SEXY! HE'S BORING!

Jim Morrison was a pretentious windbag who grew more tiresome as his badass reputation spread. But even when the Lizard King dipped into self-indulgent "poetry," much of it about his dick, he was bolstered by solid riffs: John Densmore (drums), Ray Manzarek (keyboards) and especially Robby Krieger (guitar) played sinuous late-night rock that made Morrison's worst rants bearable, if not forgivable, and amplified the sexy charisma of his best crooning. Covering live shows between '67 and '70, these four discs of audience recordings boast crud-encrusted sound ranging from murky to awful. While the set chronicles moments of scandal — including the 1969 Miami

ABOUT TO BLOW

The boy genius, unplugged and unglued

BOB DYLAN

LIVE 1964 — CONCERT AT PHILHARMONIC HALL: THE BOOTLEG SERIES VOLUME 6 ✪✪✪✪✪

COLUMBIA/LEGACY

» HAS THERE EVER been a rock star like Bob Dylan? If today's magazines existed in 1964, *People* would have voted a 23-year-old Dylan the Sexiest Man Alive, while *Us Weekly* would follow his every love affair. And still, if you talk to your college English professor, he'll likely argue that Dylan's lyrics mark a sizable contribution to English literature.

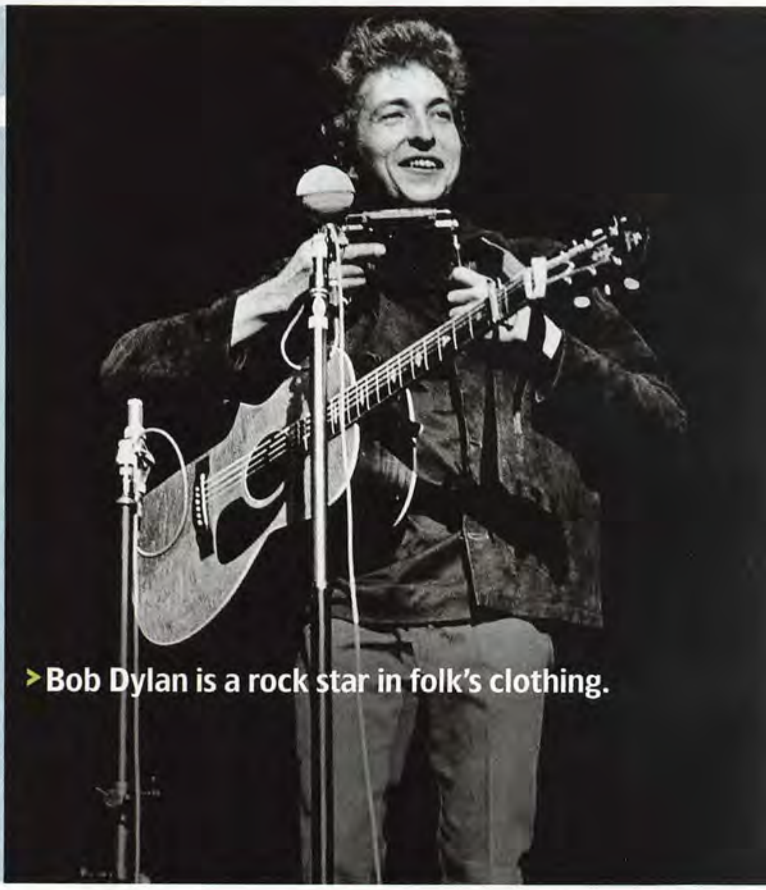
Back when the Beatles were still for teenyboppers and the Rolling Stones were still a cover band, Dylan was already full of spice, smarts and contradiction. On the basis of his first few folk albums, though, it may be hard to fully grasp why willowy babes and brainy beatniks pored over his every word and pose.

Live, though, was another story altogether. Recorded on Halloween night 1964, five months before *Bringing It All Back Home* forever blew the doors off folk-rock, this performance previewed his hallucinatory new songs for a hometown crowd. The audience at New York's Lincoln Center is pin-drop silent as Dylan introduces fresh classics like "Mr. Tambourine Man," "Gates of Eden" and — typical of their epic-poetry running times — a 10-minute rendition of "It's Alright Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)."

The wonder here is listening to a frisky 1964 Dylan preparing to dynamite his reputation. He's a rock star in folk's clothing. "This is a song about a boxer," he says during one intro, audibly intoxicated on weed, Beaujolais or adoration. "It's got nothing to do with boxing. Heh-hmm. And, ah, it's not even having to do with a boxer, really. It's got nothing to do with nothing. Heh-heh." At a sit-down folk concert, such disregard is tantamount to gobbing at the audience.

Live 1964 climaxes with four loose duets with Joan Baez, the object of one of those tabloid-worthy love affairs. Though the two are sometimes giggly, Dylan's adenoidal punk wail tensely allies with her immaculate voice. Rarely has literature sounded so lusty or unhinged. *ALEC HANLEY BEMIS*

DOWNLOAD THESE "If You Gotta Go, Go Now," "I Don't Believe You"


> Bob Dylan is a rock star in folk's clothing.

Echo & the Bunnymen: "Are you ready to rock, Delhi?"

date that prompted Morrison's arrest for indecent exposure — Krieger's elaborate, fiery solos on "Spanish Caravan" and a 20-minute "Light My Fire" offer far bigger thrills.

JON YOUNG

DOWNLOAD THIS "People Are Strange"

ECHO & THE BUNNYMEN

CROCODILES ✪✪✪✪

HEAVEN UP HERE ✪✪✪

PORCUPINE ✪✪✪✪

OCEAN RAIN ✪✪✪✪

ECHO & THE BUNNYMEN ✪✪

SIRE/RHINO

New Wave's answer to the Doors were powered by AquaNet and storms of pretension

The most determinedly trench-coated and spike-haired band of the '80s, Echo & the Bunnymen shared U2's ideal of grandeur — but while Bono went on a *Touched by an Angel*–style quest for God, the Bunnymen took the weird route, with immodest proclamations of poetic genius that made even Doors fans cackle. On their 1980 debut, *Crocodiles*, the Bunnymen were a pure nihilistic thrill, with Will Sergeant's desperate, mantra-like guitar summoning up a primal night of blinking hallucinations. By *Heaven Up Here* two years later, the songs ("A Promise," "With a Hip") were better, and singer Ian McCulloch began to reveal a delicious crack in his voice. On *Porcupine* (1983), they had parlayed it into impossibly exciting pop-rock — "The Cutter" and "Never Stop" were all tunes you could whistle, with a psychedelic edge. McCulloch declared that the 1984 follow-up was "the greatest album ever made" — and *Ocean Rain* wasn't that far off, a portrait of splendid derangement with spectacular orchestrations and their greatest song, "The Killing Moon." Egomania and off-message electronics experiments sank their eponymous 1987 comedown, but these reissues, complete with ample bonus tracks, portray a magnificent band that, even to its fans, remained a beautiful mystery.

ANDREW HARRISON

DOWNLOAD THESE "Rescue," "A Promise," "The Cutter"

GOODIE MOB

DIRTY SOUTH CLASSICS ✪✪✪

ARISTA

Socially conscious funk-hop from Close Personal Friends of Outkast

Outkast have run off with the greasy crown of Southern hip-hop, but for a while in the late '90s, they had fairly stiff competition from this equally funky but less freaky Atlanta quartet. With laid-back grooves reminiscent of classic-soul slow jams and a focus on the localized, tangible joys and frustrations of black life (the sacraments of "Soul Food," the neighborhood-as-prison metaphor in "Cell Therapy"), Cee-Lo, T-Mo, Khujo and Big Gipp had earnestness and chops. But deep as they could be — Cee-Lo's "The Experience" is a probing, intense monologue on the *n* word — they lacked the innovative genius that led Outkast to the top of the charts and the future of the music; on wild guest spots by André 3000 and Big Boi, you can practically watch as Goodie Mob get lapped.

BEN SISARIO

DOWNLOAD THESE "Soul Food," "The Experience"

I LOVE THIS CD!

SOFIA COPPOLA

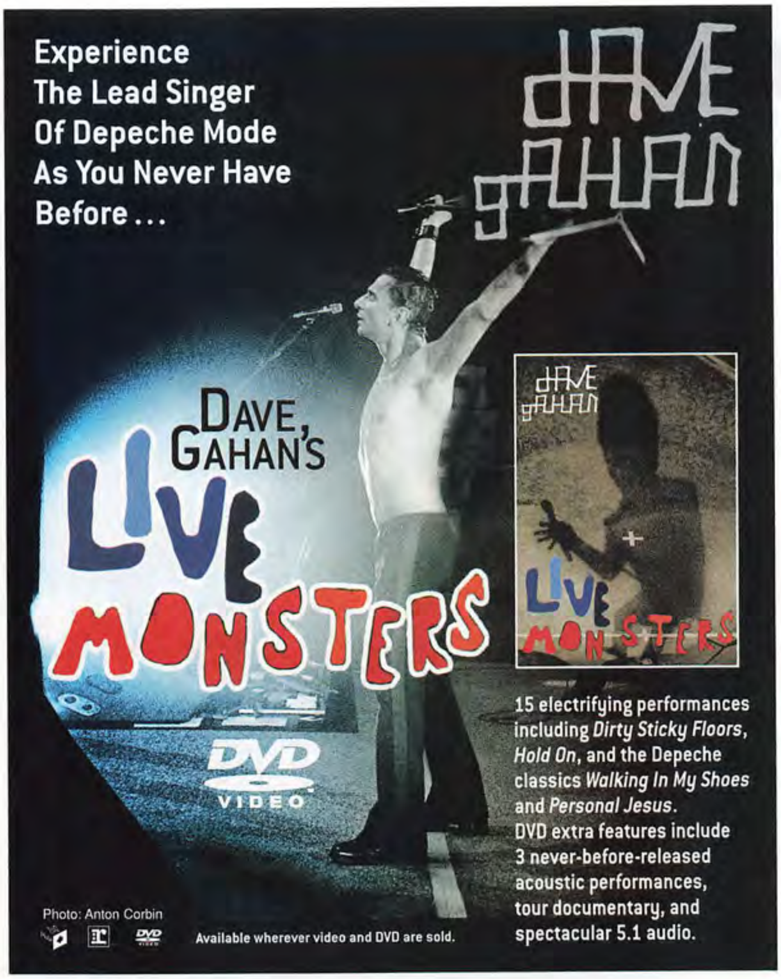
DIRECTOR OF *LOST IN TRANSLATION*

MY BLOODY VALENTINE LOVELESS

SIRE

"I can't articulate exactly why, but this has something I really respond to. It has this feeling about it that I relate to."

* Note: Not all of the "Download These" songs are legally available for download — yet. In those instances, *Blender* encourages you to purchase the original CD. Opposite page, from top: LFI; courtesy of Columbia/Legacy. This page, from top: Kevin Cummins/Idols; John Spellman/Retna Ltd.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The Meat Puppets: "I told you that wasn't our luggage!"

DRUG QUEENS

Hits from Cobain faves who soared like the Eagles on mesc

THE MEAT PUPPETS

CLASSIC PUPPETS ✪✪✪

RYKODISC

WHEN NIRVANA RECORDED *MTV Unplugged* in 1994, they included several cover songs to tip their hat to their influences: Leadbelly, David Bowie, the Vaselines. But Cobain & Co. used the MTV gig to turn the world on to one band above all others: Phoenix's Meat Puppets. The brothers Curt and Cris Kirkwood joined Nirvana onstage for three numbers, still the only Meat Puppets songs ever heard by millions.

The Puppets were one of the first bands to make the move that Nirvana perfected 10 years later: embracing American punk and then transcending it. The trio got its start as an admittedly drug-addled hardcore band. But within a year, head writer Curt was channeling the anarchy into actual songs, often with a country tinge, and the band had found its sound: a sizzled desert pastoral, with fuzz-tone guitar riffs, rubbery bass, lean drumming and Curt's voice cracking whenever he sang above his half-octave range. Which was usually.

Think the music of the early Eagles stripped of all prettiness. ★

Meat Puppets II (the 1983 album supplies four tracks here, as well as the three covered on *Unplugged*) combined punk-rock energy with jam-band looseness — think Grateful Dead infused with DIY nonchalance, or even early Eagles stripped of all professionalism and prettiness. "The best rock & roll reminds me of teenagers fucking on angel dust," Curt once said. It's an image of grinding, stupefied abandon, and the Puppets perfected it on the original, plugged version of "Lake of Fire."

Up on the Sun (1985) showed the Puppets grown more sophisticated, with a richer mix of overdubs and harmonies, especially on the title track (also included on *Classic*); it ranks with R.E.M.'s *Murmur* among the great leftfield beauties of the '80s.

That was the peak. What's more, the band knows it: Drummer Derrick Bostrum writes in *Classic*'s liner notes, "Most fans would probably have us collect *Meat Puppets II* and *Up on the Sun* on one disc, call it *The Best of the Meat Puppets* and get on with our lives." Which turns out not to be such a bad idea. Beyond the seven tracks from the A-list albums, the cuts *Classic* takes from the next four LPs are a litany of the Puppets' failed attempts to get their groove back. *STEVE BODOW*

DOWNLOAD THESE "Lake of Fire," "Up on the Sun"

GREEN DAY

1,039/SMOOTHED OUT SLAPPY HOURS ✪✪

LOOKOUT!

Revisiting the East Bay neopunk band's awkward years

With 1994's *Dookie*, Green Day demonstrated what the Ramones would have sounded like if they had preferred smoking pot to sniffing glue. That minor refinement propelled the Berkeley, California, trio to multiplatinum status, sparking a major punk resurgence. Before *Dookie*, however, Green Day were understandably obscure — you can see why here. Their early tunes, released on two EPs and an album in 1989 and 1990, were punchy but indistinct is-she-really-going-out-with-him? laments. Those 18 songs (plus one) were compiled on *1,039/Smoothed Out Slappy Hours*, a 1991 collection now remastered and reissued. Ironically, it's the cover of fellow Cali-punkers Operation Ivy's "Knowledge" — whose sing-along chorus is "All I know/Is that I don't know" — that establishes the philosophical premise for Green Day's subsequent career.

MARK JENKINS

DOWNLOAD THIS "Knowledge"

BRUCE HORNSBY

GREATEST RADIO HITS ✪✪✪

RCA

Hits and previously unreleased tracks trail singer from ungainly pop star to jam-band hero

A lanky pianist from Virginia, Bruce Hornsby started out in the late '80s as an anomaly — an artist with unusual song structures and strident messages who hit the top of the charts. His subjects ranged from racism ("The Way It Is," later sampled by Tupac Shakur) to unwanted pregnancy ("The Valley Road"). Then in 1990, he had a hit, "Across the River," that featured Jerry Garcia on guitar, and soon Hornsby was touring with the Dead and experimenting in the studio, letting loose his improvisational gusto. It took him away from the charts, but as proved by two new live tracks — a revved-up version of "Jacob's Ladder," the hit he wrote for Huey Lewis, and an introspective take on "The End of the Innocence," made famous by Don Henley — he doesn't miss them. On the final song, "Go Back to Your Woods," a fresh 2003 collaboration with '60s serious-music icon Robbie Robertson, Hornsby sounds positively ebullient.

JOHN DONOHUE

DOWNLOAD THESE "Go Back to Your Woods," "Jacob's Ladder"

HOUSE OF PAIN

THE BEST OF HOUSE OF PAIN AND EVERLAST: SHAMROCKS AND SHENANIGANS ✪✪

RHINO

Weak greatest-hits set from the Irish rapping team that almost made bagpipes gangsta

ST. PATTY GOES URBAN

Remember when white rappers were still gimmicks? Ice-T protégés House of Pain, who stereotyped themselves as Irish-American louts, hit big in 1994 with the rollicking, siren-riffed "Jump Around," produced by Cypress Hill's DJ Muggs. Frontman Everlast relied on his gruff baritone and musclehead attitude, as his rhymes sucked. Meanwhile, his late-'90s solo forays into folk-funk drag under the weight of his wizened, bathetic croak (the recession ballad "Ends" and the megalomaniacal "Black Jesus"). "Jump Around" isn't the only worthwhile cut: "Just Another Victim," a bracing, cowbell-accented collaboration between House of Pain and metal-grunge innovators Helmet,

BURIED TREASURE

UNEARTHING LOST CLASSICS >>

THE CLASH

SANDINISTA! ✪✪✪✪

EPIC, 1980

The Clash succeed in wearing an entire cow.

The punk heroes' "experimental" triple album was blasted when it came out for being self-indulgent and heavily padded, and it is — the children's choir singing "Career Opportunities" was a pretty dubious idea. But the Clash's self-indulgence has aged incredibly well: Their funk is convincing, their dub is deep, their rock/dance fusion is foresighted and most of their dubious ideas are kinda cool anyway. Decades later, it sounds like an explosion of creativity from a great band figuring out how not to repeat itself. *DOUGLAS WOLK*

Michael Halsband/Corbis Outline (the Meat Puppets); Alphonse Telymonde (still-life); Roger Ressmeyer/Corbis (the Clash)

The Isleys regret jacking that pimp-gear delivery truck.

flattens the mediocre boasts and bleats that fill up the disc. Of course, Everlast's rhymes still suck.

NICK CATUCCI

DOWNLOAD THIS "Just Another Victim"

THE ISLEY BROTHERS

LIVE IT UP ✪✪✪✪

EPIC/T-NECK/LEGACY

The roots of Mr. Biggs, back when he was just Ronald Isley

Ronald Isley was an R&B institution long before his trysts with R. Kelly and Burt Bacharach, having scored hits as early as the late '50s. Released in 1974, *Live It Up* found the Isley Brothers riding a creative resurgence, with the original vocal trio of Ronald, Rudolph and O'Kelly receiving fountain-of-youth backing from younger brothers and in-laws. Using Stevie Wonder's "Superstition" as a model, this terrific album rubs funk up against pop, wrapping Ronald's sweet, piercing voice in Chris Jasper's bubbling synthesizer grooves. Even at six minutes, the surging title track seems short, thanks to Ernie Isley's blazing guitar, which recalls former Isleys sideman Jimi Hendrix. On the ballad front, Ronald reminds the kids who's the star here by cooing a buttery-smooth "Hello It's Me" that tops Todd Rundgren's original.

JON YOUNG

DOWNLOAD THESE "Live It Up," "Need a Little Taste of Love"

I LOVE THIS CD!

OMAR EPPS
ACTOR IN *AGAINST THE ROPES* AND *ALFIE*

LAURYN HILL
THE MISEDUCATION OF LAURYN HILL
RUFFHOUSE/COLUMBIA

"I've bought it eight times. If it gets scratched, I'll buy another, because it's like Mozart. It defines an art form."

LITTLE RICHARD

THE OKEH SESSIONS ✪✪✪

EPIC/LEGACY

Rock's first piano wizard adapts to changes in R&B

The legend of Little Richard is based entirely on the sides he cut with Bumps Blackwell for Specialty Records between September 1955 and January 1957. This was pure rock & roll: lewd, feral, prophetically fast, prophetically funky and beset by the identity confusion of a man who never did figure out if he was gay. All that's accomplished by his other recordings is to demonstrate that his power howl and crazed piano triplets are equal to but not ideal for gospel, kiddie novelties, whatever's requested — on these mid-'60s sessions, the soul-R&B cusp. Their sole revelation: four previously unreleased tracks produced in London by Norman Hurricane Smith, at least three of which could sneak onto the Specialty box that pure rock & rollers treasure.

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

DOWNLOAD THESE "Rocking Chair," "Get Down With It"

THE LONG RYDERS

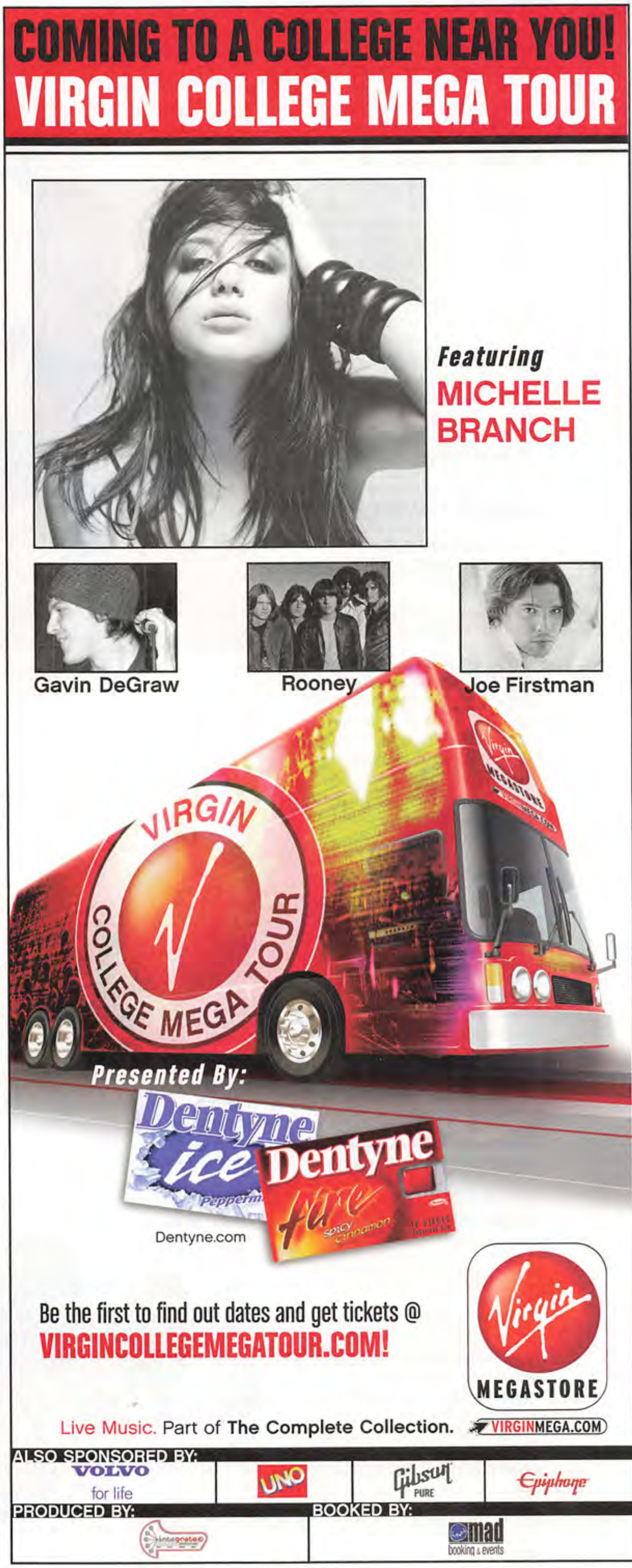
THREE MINUTE WARNINGS: THE LONG RYDERS LIVE IN NEW YORK CITY ✪✪✪

PRIMA

High ideals, low sales: This pre-alt-country band died with its boots on

Of the bands in L.A.'s Paisley Underground (the Bangles, Dream Syndicate, Rain Parade), the Long Ryders were the least demure. Their

From top: courtesy of Epic; John Spellman/Retna Ltd.



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songs used Confederate imagery to transmit a hard-nosed idealism that jibed with the ethics of mid-'80s punk; from Merle Haggard they copped a drumbeat of rampant bitterness. By May 1987, when this show at New York's Bottom Line was recorded, the band was on the verge of disintegration — their final album, *Two-Fisted Tales,* would royally flop — so they played as if it were their last chance to thumb their nose at the universe's neglect. "State of My Union" escalates into a Stones-style twin-guitar shootout; "Looking for Lewis and Clark" buries the moral corruption of the Reagan era under a mountain of Crazy Horse distortion.

KAREN SCHOEMER

DOWNLOAD THESE "State of My Union," "Looking for Lewis and Clark"

PERCY MAYFIELD

HIS TANGERINE AND ATLANTIC SIDES ✪✪✪

RHINO HANDMADE

Blues pioneer ponders life and love with the help of an orchestra

Excepting Muddy Waters wordman Willie Dixon, the eloquent depressive Percy Mayfield was the blues' greatest post-World War II songwriter, and unlike Dixon, he could sing. The classic tracks that fill two Specialty compilations were cut before a disfiguring accident ended his live career. But this collection captures his professional peak, when Ray Charles had him under contract. In 1961, Mayfield's "Hit the Road Jack" went to number 1 for Charles, who reciprocated by putting its creator in the studio with crack musicians who loved him. His baritone blurred by booze and tribulation, Mayfield doesn't altogether kill such self-explanatory titles as "River's Invitation" and "Life Is Suicide." But even on this completist package's lesser songs, you can hear him brooding — and trying to put a wry face on it.

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

DOWNLOAD THESE "River's Invitation," "Pretty-Eyed Baby"

YOUSSOU N'DOUR

SEVEN SECONDS: THE BEST OF YOUSSOU N'DOUR ✪✪✪✪

COLUMBIA/LEGACY

Africa's greatest singer explores the joys and pitfalls of crossover cred

Senegalese megastar Youssou N'Dour and his percusso-delic Super Etoile band have been making some of the world's most adventurously swinging music in any genre since the mid-'70s. However, this best-of (titled after N'Dour's lugubrious 1993 duet with U.K. chanteuse Neneh Cherry) concentrates on his ambitious if inconsistent attempts to Westernize, or tame, the wild rhythmic complexities of the Senegalese pop style known as *m'balax.* N'Dour's Islam-inflected, Wolof-language vocals always provide a heady, keening virtuoso kick, as on "Birima," but his English tends to sound pinched and strained. All is right in both worlds whenever his band erupts into ecstatic *m'balax* meltdowns, but whoever suggested including his insipid cover of the Beatles' "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da" should really meet Maxwell's silver hammer.

RICHARD GEHR

DOWNLOAD THESE "Set," "Birima"

Candi Staton loved her house on the sun.

NEW EDITION

HITS ✪✪✪

GEFFEN

Squeaky teens' greatest-hits collection showcases the formula that launched a thousand boy bands

Now that New Edition are old enough to drink, they celebrate their twenty-first birthday by popping a new cork on old champagne. Producer Maurice Starr's Boston lads, who later fractured into a few solo acts and New Jackers Bell Biv DeVoe, set the matrix for the boy-band takeover: no lead, just five cuties living in the upper registers with the angels and the little girls, who understood for a year or two. But the smoothest harmonizing, naivest sensuality and doublest entendres can't undo built-in obsolescence, and despite new material (including a Missy Elliott fly-by), the history lesson seems a half-hour too long — and begins three minutes too late, missing first hit "Candy Girl" for reasons the boys don't know, but the little lawyers understand.

RENE VIENET

DOWNLOAD THESE "Cool It Now," "If It Isn't Love"

New Edition, with a "pre-crazy" Bobby Brown (center)

PARIS

THE DEVIL MADE ME DO IT ✪✪✪✪

SLEEPING WITH THE ENEMY ✪✪✪✪

GUERRILLA FUNK/UNLEASHED ✪✪✪

GUERRILLA FUNK

Music to hate Republicans to: Oakland agit-rapper's first four albums

Get Paris's diet right: "The only motherfuckin' pig I eat is police." Always a degree or two more incendiary than other early-'90s "literate" rappers, Oscar Jackson Jr. achieved the most notoriety for one of his clunkiest songs, "Bush Killa," in which he envisioned taking out Dubya's dad with a semiautomatic. Below the bluster, though, Paris was one of hip-hop's deeper thinkers. Boosted by chaotic, urgent production influenced by Public Enemy's Bomb Squad, 1990's *Devil* and 1993's *Enemy* championed anti-authoritarianism and Afrocentric pride. Even when Paris traded cacophony for sleeker grooves on 1994's *Guerrilla Funk* and 1998's *Unleashed* (working, oddly, as an investment banker in between), he didn't tone down his politics: On "One Time fo Ya Mind," he swears he'll smear "shit stains on your flag till I'm through." Better get the Shout Wipes!

JON CARAMANICA

DOWNLOAD THESE "Break the Grip of Shame," "The Hate That Hate Made," "Sleeping With the Enemy"

DOUG SAHM

THE GENUINE TEXAS GROOVER ✪✪✪✪

ATLANTIC/RHINO HANDMADE

Alt-country trailblazer drops his fake Brit accent, grows out his hippie hair

AMERICANA PIONEER

Groover is as good a word as any for a man who slid comfortably into every genre he ever heard — and a few he made up himself: In a three-song stretch, for instance, starting with "Your Friends," Sahm struts through Chicago blues, swipes the accordion-heavy style of Tex-Mex *conjunto,* and waltzes through "Wallflower" with author Bob Dylan singing backup. Rhino's two-CD limited-edition set gathers Sahm's two guest-riddled, out-of-print Atlantic albums of 1973, recorded after the demise of Sahm's country-rock Sir Douglas Quintet (in which the Texas native came to fame pretending to be an invading Brit), and adds 19 previously unreleased tracks featuring, among others, Dylan and Jerry Garcia. It would be indispensable if fewer outtakes sounded so off-the-cuff; as it is, the set is "only" a high point in one of rock's most uncategorizable careers.

JOHN DEFORE

DOWNLOAD THESE "(Is Anybody Going To) San Antone," "Nitty Gritty"

CANDI STATON

CANDI STATON ✪✪✪✪✪

HONEST JONS/ASTRALWERKS

Staggering and stanky Southern soul sides unearthed

Candi Staton is remembered, if at all, largely as a one-hit wonder, the voice behind the 1976 dance anthem "Young Hearts Run Free." As these late-'60s and early-'70s tracks prove, that's only a fraction of the story. Staton had escaped an abusive marriage to become a singer: Working in a nursing home by day, she sang at night like a woman with nothing to lose. Her rasping voice adds a startling emotional rawness to taut,

From top: Michael Ochs Archives; Ron Wolfson/LFI

funky songs; on "Do Your Duty," she sounds ready to drag her errant man to the altar using a lasso. Staton may have been out of step with soul's '70s swing toward smooth seduction, but her cover of "In the Ghetto" earned her at least one fan letter — from Elvis Presley. This compilation should earn her many more.

JAMES SLAUGHTER

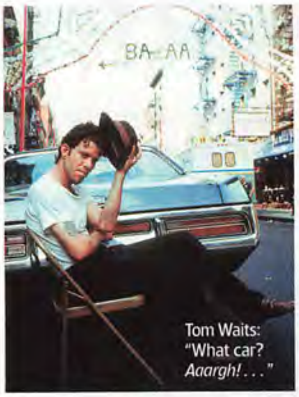
DOWNLOAD THIS "I'd Rather Be an Old Man's Sweetheart (Than a Young Man's Fool)"

TOM WAITS AND CRYSTAL GAYLE

ONE FROM THE HEART SOUNDTRACK ✪✪✪✪

COLUMBIA/LEGACY

Las Vegas–themed soundtrack to marital misery



Tom Waits: "What car? *Aargh! . . .*"

Tom Waits was nominated for an Academy Award for this exquisite lounge suite from Francis Ford Coppola's 1982 quasi-musical about a couple's weekend of temptation in Las Vegas. A corny setup for a movie, but a perfect melodramatic archetype for Waits, whose gravel-voiced lout meets its foil in Nashville hitmaker Crystal Gayle; her flawless soprano seems innocent at first, but it turns out she's been around the block a few times herself. These are 14 gems of cynical, lovesick wit, including "Picking Up After You," a priceless breakup duet packed with lines you don't ever want to hear in person ("The roses are dead, and the violets are too/And I'm sick and tired of picking up after you"). A missing link in Waits's career, this was the last group of songs in his piano-bar '70s style, with glimpses of the clamorous, surrealistic jazz he developed on *Swordfishtrombones* and later albums.

BEN SISARIO

DOWNLOAD THESE "Picking Up After You," "You Can't Unring a Bell"

BLENDER APPROVED

The best **REISSUES** of the last three months

the cure
join the dots

THE CURE

JOIN THE DOTS: B-SIDES AND RARITIES, 1978–2001

RHINO/WARNER BROS.

These rare mopes from the '80s goth kings run from youthful, suburban angst to sunnier pop forays.

EMMYLOU HARRRIS

PIECES OF THE SKY

RHINO/WARNER BROS.

After bandmate Gram Parsons OD'd, the wildly influential Harris went solo with this 1975 country masterpiece of feisty feminism and morose folk.

al green
the absolute best

AL GREEN

THE ABSOLUTE BEST

THE RIGHT STUFF/HI

Green never put his name on a bad album, though he does have a helluva lot of hits comps. This two-CD set ranks among the best.

underworld 1992—2002

UNDERWORLD

1992–2002

V2

These electronica gods write songs as catchy as pure pop, as adventurous as Miles Davis — "Born Slippy," from *Trainspotting,* is a highlight here.

George Dubose/LFI (Waits)

BLENDER'S PROMOTIONAL SECTION

GUEST LIST

COMPETITIONS, EVENTS AND OTHER FUN STUFF WE THOUGHT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

WHO IS RODNEY BINGENHEIMER?

WIN!

RODNEY BINGENHEIMER
★MAYOR OF THE★
SUNSET STRIP
ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK TO THE MOTION PICTURE
COLDPLAY
DAVID BOWIE

» Who is Rodney Bingenheimer? Only the man who put bands like the Ramones, Blondie, Coldplay, Van Halen and scores more on the map. Now this pop impresario turned DJ turned club owner is the subject of a critically acclaimed film, *Mayor of the Sunset Strip.* And the soundtrack is smoking hot! The film opens March 26, and the soundtrack drops on March 16. As an appetite-whetter, *Blender,* Shout! Factory and First Look Media want to make you a winner. **We're giving one grand-prize winner the ultimate *Mayor* prize package:**

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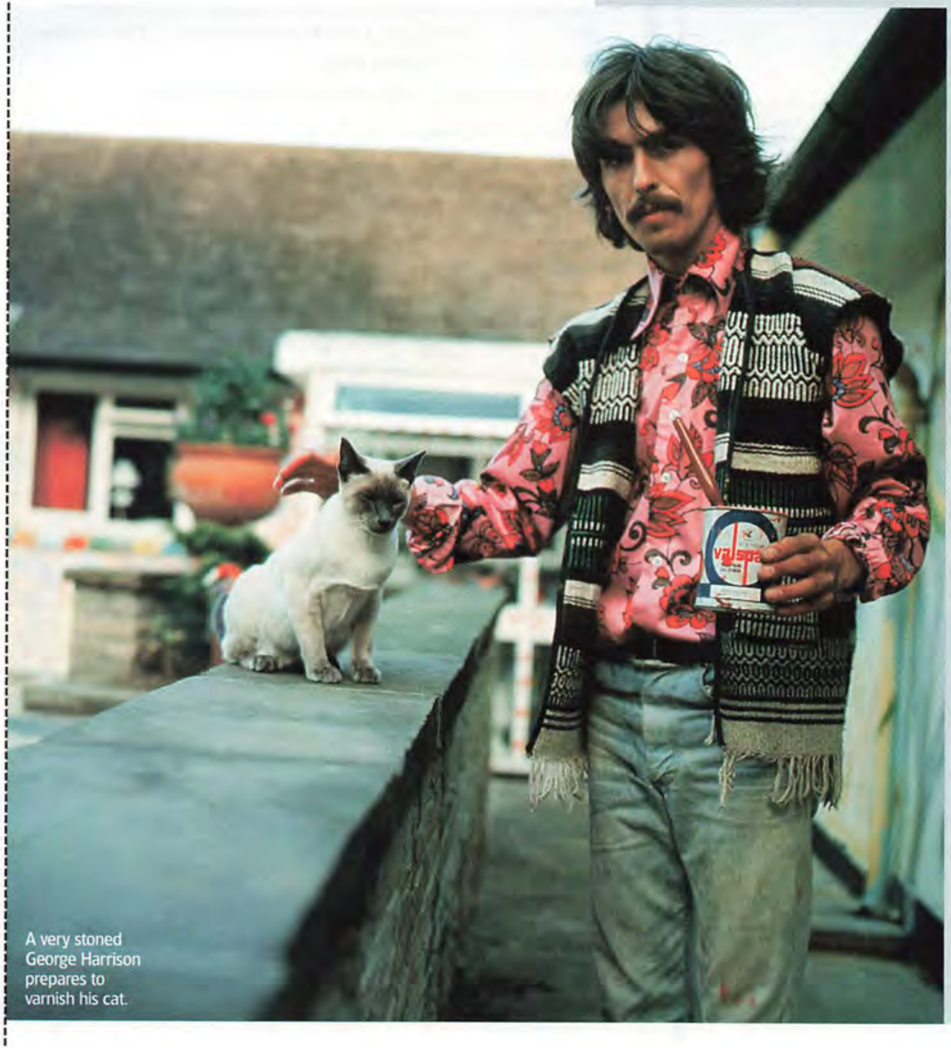
EVERY ORIGINAL CD REVIEWED

GEORGE HARRISON

THE YOUNGEST BEATLE, forever overshadowed in the band, liked to call himself a "dark horse," not without reason. It wasn't until the solo records Harrison made after the Beatles' breakup in 1970 that he finally blossomed as an artist. Always a melodic guitarist, he proved himself a classic songwriter whose initial output rivaled the commercial success of both John Lennon and Paul McCartney.

Even though a court found his biggest hit, "My Sweet Lord," to be a copy of someone else's song, Harrison's reputation is secure enough to see him inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. He was the man who introduced Indian music to Western pop, and also Eastern religion — his songs are full of spiritual yearning. Yet his serious nature concealed a pleasing silly streak. Only a Harrison tribute show — such as the all-star London concert a year after his 2001 death — could follow a song like "The Inner Light" with one called "Sit on My Face."
By Paul Du Noyer


A very stoned George Harrison prepares to varnish his cat.

BLENDER APPROVED

ALL THINGS MUST PASS
APPLE/CAPITOL, 1970
✪✪✪✪✪

THREE-LP FEAST!

Harrison's first post-Beatle album was an explosion of pent-up energy, and it remains his greatest achievement. Liberated from the sidekick status he had endured with Lennon and McCartney, Harrison stunned everyone with a triple-LP feast of inspired songwriting, including his huge hit "My Sweet Lord." While a few of the slighter songs are overwhelmed by Phil Spector's colossal production, and the all-star jam session is indulgent, most of the music sounds deeply felt, by turns romantic and spiritual. A double-CD thirtieth-anniversary edition added yet more material.
Standout tracks: "My Sweet Lord," "All Things Must Pass," "Isn't It a Pity"

GREAT

THE CONCERT FOR BANGLA DESH *APPLE/CAPITOL, 1971*
✪✪✪✪

Civil war caused horrific suffering in Pakistan's breakaway state of Bangladesh. With his friend the Indian sitar maestro Ravi Shankar, Harrison responded by staging an emergency benefit show at Madison Square Garden. He was backed by Eric Clapton, Leon Russell and Badfinger, with a star turn by Bob Dylan. The performances are sometimes untidy, but the occasion still crackles with drama. This was an historic show that set the template for rock benefits such as Live Aid.
Standout tracks: "Wah-Wah," "While My Guitar Gently Weeps," "Mr. Tambourine Man"

LIVING IN THE MATERIAL WORLD *APPLE/CAPITOL, 1973*
✪✪✪✪

While it could never match the blockbuster scale or success of *All Things Must Pass*, the follow-up found Harrison still making maximum use of his creative freedom. Beatle bitterness lingers in "Sue Me, Sue You Blues," but peace, love and devotion to Krishna are the abiding themes, expressed with a melodic flair marred only by the occasional weakness of his singing.
Standout tracks: "Give Me Love (Give Me Peace on Earth)," "Don't Let Me Wait Too Long," "Be Here Now"

BEST OF DARK HORSE 1976–1989
DARK HORSE/WARNER BROS., 1989
✪✪✪✪

Impending CD reissues should rescue this period of Harrison's work from the neglect from which it has suffered in recent years. Highlights of the five albums on his own label are joined by a few original tracks and the rocking guitar showcase of "Cheer Down," from the soundtrack to *Lethal Weapon 2*.
Standout tracks: "Blow Away," "Got My Mind Set on You"

Bob Whitaker/Camera Press/Retna Ltd

CHECK IT OUT

THE BEST OF GEORGE HARRISON *CAPITOL, 1976*

✪✪✪

With Harrison now free from his Apple Records contract, this brief summary of his story so far was split between Beatle songs and solo tracks. It's generally hard to fault, and it's also a good place to get the fine 1971 single "Bangla Desh."

Standout tracks: "Something," "Here Comes the Sun," "My Sweet Lord"

THIRTY-THREE & 1/3

DARK HORSE, 1976

✪✪✪

The first fruit of Harrison's Dark Horse label deal with Warner Bros. took its name from both the turntable speed of an LP and his age at the time. Punk rock rendered Harrison obsolete in his homeland, but U.S. radio warmed to this album's expertise and tunefulness.

Standout tracks: "Crackerbox Palace," "Learning How to Love You"

CLOUD NINE *DARK HORSE, 1987*

✪✪✪

BEST OF THE '80s

Co-production by former ELO leader Jeff Lynne brought Harrison the shiniest sound of his solo career — and a hit single in his cover of the R&B obscurity "Got My Mind Set on You." Ringo Starr, Eric Clapton and Elton John assisted on one of Harrison's least spiritual but most accessible records.

Standout tracks: "Wreck of the Hesperus," "Got My Mind Set on You"

BRAINWASHED *CAPITOL, 2002*

✪✪✪

Harrison worked on *Brainwashed* for two years before his death in 2001, leaving his son, Dhani (who plays guitar throughout), and producer Jeff Lynne to complete the job. If Harrison's sermonizing can be clunky, it's impressive that his spiritual quest persisted to the very end.

Standout tracks: "Any Road," "Looking for My Life"

BE CAREFUL

WONDERWALL MUSIC

APPLE/CAPITOL, 1968

✪✪

The first solo album by any Beatle was Harrison's soundtrack to an art movie about a Peeping Tom. The tracks are instrumental snippets — some in a Beatlesque style, others recorded with Indian musicians in Bombay. Fun in parts.

Standout tracks: "Gat Kirwani," "Party Seacombe"

DARK HORSE *APPLE/CAPITOL, 1974*

✪✪

Losing his wife, Patti, to his best friend, Eric Clapton, led Harrison into an uncharacteristic spell of rock-star excess. His personal turmoil is plain to hear on this ragged, unhappy album. He mocks the errant couple in a parody of "Bye Bye Love," though he and Clapton soon reconciled.

Standout track: "Far East Man"

EXTRA TEXTURE *APPLE/CAPITOL, 1975*

✪✪

The good news: Harrison had now met his future wife, Olivia, a secretary at his Los Angeles office. The last music of his 13 years with EMI, though, verged on the apathetic. A few cute tunes and studio polish only partially compensate.

Standout tracks: "You," "This Guitar (Can't Keep From Crying)," "Can't Stop Thinking About You"

GEORGE HARRISON

DARK HORSE, 1979

✪✪

Steve Winwood collaborated on this tuneful, largely acoustic album, made in Harrison's twin retreats of tropical Hawaii and rural England, reflecting a man content to let the rock & roll mainstream pass him by. It notably revived "Not Guilty," an aborted Beatles cut.

Standout tracks: "Your Love Is Forever," "Blow Away"

FOR FANS ONLY

ELECTRONIC SOUND *EMI, 1969*

✪

ELECTRO DRECK!

Harrison experimented at length with synthesizer technology, to patience-sapping effect. Significantly, his music never went this way again.

Standout track: "Under the Mersey Wall"

SOMEWHERE IN ENGLAND

DARK HORSE, 1981

✪

Harrison turned sullen in these unfocused swipes at pollution, the music business and disco. He got a macabre commercial boost via "All Those Years Ago," a tribute to the murdered John Lennon.

Standout track: "Life Itself"

GONE TROPPO *DARK HORSE, 1982*

✪✪

An unexceptional set from a man who probably felt he had more interesting things to do. In fact, upon its release he retired for five years to concentrate on gardening and his film company.

Standout track: "That's the Way It Goes"

CHANT AND BE HAPPY! INDIAN DEVOTIONAL SONGS

XXI, 1991

✪✪

In 1969, Harrison took his friends the London Radha Krishna Temple into the Beatles' Apple studio and gave them a British pop hit with "Hare Krishna Mantra."

Standout track: "Govinda Jaya Jaya"

LIVE IN JAPAN *DARK HORSE, 1992*

✪✪

Coaxed out of his mansion by Eric Clapton, Harrison played some Far East dates in 1991, pleasing crowds with Beatle favorites.

Standout track: "Something"

FURTHER LISTENING

TRAVELING WILBURYS
TRAVELING WILBURYS VOL. 1

WARNER BROS., 1988

✪✪✪✪

The first, and best, of Harrison's lighthearted musical holidays with Bob Dylan, Tom Petty, Jeff Lynne and (this time only) Roy Orbison. Superstars shed the burdens of their legend for some infectious country-rock.

FURTHER READING

I ME MINE BY GEORGE HARRISON

CHRONICLE, 2002

✪✪✪✪

Harrison's widow, Olivia, adds an intro to this brief 1980 autobiography; it's light on Beatle facts but lovable for its humor and modesty, and it's useful for Harrison's song-by-song commentary.

FURTHER VIEWING

CONCERT FOR GEORGE

WSM, 2003

✪✪✪✪

Paul McCartney, Eric Clapton and Ringo Starr head the stellar cast of a London tribute show filmed in 2002. Look for Tom Hanks in the massed ranks of Monty Python lumberjacks.

Hellboy uses his stone hand as a villain-clobbering machine.

MONSTER MASH

At last — a big-screen superhero who knows how to party! By Clark Collis

HELLBOY

DIRECTED BY Guillermo del Toro

STARRING Ron Perlman, Doug Jones, Selma Blair, John Hurt, Jeffrey Tambor

"Will you *stop* pointing that thing at my balls!"

OUTSIDE OF THEIR tendency to rearrange villains' faces into less symmetrical configurations, most comic superheroes lead fairly monastic lives. Superman's appointment diary, for example, is entirely lacking in visits to the racetrack, while the spidey senses of Peter Parker are rarely, if ever, befuddled by the effects of a coke-and-whore bender in Tijuana. No, the superhero lot is an abstemious one — unless his name is Hellboy.

The creation of writer-illustrator Mike Mignola, this demon was, as an infant, transported from hell by occult-obsessed Nazis but now fights evil as a member of the ultra-secret Bureau for Paranormal Research and Defense. So far, so normal-ish, comics-wise.

But Hellboy is not the kind of guy given to brooding about his heritage in some unfurnished garret. No, Hellboy is the kind of guy who appreciates the finer things in life — notably beer — and who is thrilled when a vampire-hunting trip to Romania seems to be a wild goose chase, because he knows some good eateries in the area ("Paprika chicken, baby!"). Combine such traits with a more traditional enthusiasm for using his stone hand as a villain-clobbering machine, and you have a seemingly irresistible big-screen hero.

Or so hopes director Guillermo del Toro, who claims he made 2002's *Blade II* purely in the hope that it would give him Hollywood clout to make *Hellboy* his way. That way included declining to cast Nicolas Cage as Hellboy in favor of the always great (if usually further down the cast list) Ron Perlman.

True, other recent adaptations of comicdom's weirder titles — *From Hell*; *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* — have ranged from horrible to diabolical. But del Toro's résumé — he also made *Cronos* and *Mimic* — marks him as arguably the greatest horror director working today. And how wrong can you go with a central character whose wish to fight the good fight is matched only by his desire to find a good restaurant?

REAL-LIFE HELLBOYS

Some deals with the devil work out better than others . . .

MYSTERIOUS DEATH!
Jack Parsons
A brilliant rocket scientist, Parsons was also a leader of an occult religion called Thelema, which was intent on ushering in an era of free love. He died in a mysterious explosion in his home lab in 1952.

CAREER NOSEDIVE!
Sammy Davis Jr.
In 1973, a year after "The Candy Man," Davis's song from the *Willy Wonka* soundtrack, reached number 1, he joined the Church of Satan. His career foundered. He went broke, and after his death in 1990, the IRS handed his widow a multimillion-dollar tax bill.

NEVER-ENDING FAME
Ben Franklin
The coauthor of the Declaration of Independence was a member of London's Hellfire Club, rumored to have had Satanic orgies. He lived to 84 and is celebrated anytime someone spends a $100 bill.

Sammy: "An electrified floor, Frank? Hilarious!"

Courtesy of Sony (Hellboy, 2); J. Wilds/Getty Images (Davis)

THE WHOLE TEN YARDS

DIRECTED BY Howard Deutch

STARRING Bruce Willis, Matthew Perry, Amanda Peet, Kevin Pollak, Natasha Henstridge

LIKE A MODERN-DAY Shroud of Turin, the existence of this sequel to 2000's *The Whole Nine Yards* defies all rational explanations, given that the original was neither funny nor particularly successful. Do Hollywood execs really believe there is a silent army of people secretly desperate to learn the fates of Bruce Willis's wisecracking retired hitman or Matthew Perry's Chandler-clone dentist? Or is the whole enterprise the result of some unfortunate clerical error? Either way, you probably won't be all that interested to know that this time around, Perry seeks Willis's help after his wife is captured by the always hilarious "Hungarian mob."

DOGVILLE

DIRECTED BY Lars von Trier

STARRING Nicole Kidman, Paul Bettany, Ben Gazzara, Lauren Bacall

DANISH ARCH-LOON Lars von Trier's latest is a dark, Depression-era satire shot on a largely prop-free soundstage where the streets and houses are just chalk lines on the floor. Kidman plays Grace, a mysterious stranger who stumbles on a bleak mining town while on the run from gangsters, but von Trier's deceptively simple storyline belies a tense undertow of cruelty and paranoia while building to a slick, sick crescendo after a surprisingly swift three hours. Plus, Stellan Skarsgård fans who have ever wondered what the great Swedish actor's nut sack looks like are in for a treat. *DAMON WISE*

Frank Masi/Warner Bros. (The Whole Ten Yards); courtesy of Lionsgate (Dogville); Elliott Marks/Warner Bros. (Starsky & Hutch); Richard Cartwright/Walt Disney Pictures (Hidalgo); Joy E. Scheller/LFI (Coyne); courtesy of Focus Features (Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind); Michael Gibson/Paramount Pictures (Mean Girls); courtesy of Touchstone/Buena Vista (The Ladykillers); Deana Newcomb/Touchstone Pictures (The Alamo); Brian Hamill/DreamWorks (Envy); Bob Akester/MGM (Walking Tall)

BLENDER APPROVED

The best MOVIES of the last three months

STARSKY & HUTCH

Wilson and Stiller yuk it up as the cop duo, while Snoop Dogg singularly fails to demonstrate his range playing the pimptastic Huggy Bear.

HIDALGO

The Lord of the Rings' Viggo Mortensen gets back on a horse for a non-jewelry-related true-life adventure in the desert.

LAST GOOD MOVIE YOU SAW?

ROCK THE VOTE

WAYNE COYNE
FLAMING LIPS VISIONARY

"*To Kill a Mockingbird.* I am reminded once again that great movies are great because they're like real life — they're unpredictable. The most frightening scene is the attempted murder of a giant ham."

AND THE REST...

DON'T MISS

ETERNAL SUNSHINE OF THE SPOTLESS MIND

DIRECTED BY Michel Gondry

STARRING Jim Carrey, Kate Winslet

THE PITCH Former lovers Winslet and Carrey arrange to have all memory of their relationship wiped clean, with surreal consequences.

THE VERDICT Sure, it's better than *Human Nature,* Gondry's previous collaboration with writer Charlie Kaufman. But wouldja believe it also tops Kaufman's *Being John Malkovich*?

MEAN GIRLS

DIRECTED BY Mark S. Waters

STARRING Lindsay Lohan, Tina Fey

THE PITCH A formerly home-tutored teen gets schooled by her bitchy new classmates in the three R's: rivalry, revenge and . . . something else bad that starts with *r.*

THE VERDICT With a wickedly funny script by *Saturday Night Live's* Tina Fey (a self-confessed former mean girl herself), we could be looking at a twenty-first-century *Heathers.*

DON'T RUSH

THE LADYKILLERS

DIRECTED BY Joel Coen and Ethan Coen

STARRING Tom Hanks, Marlon Wayans

THE PITCH A Hanks-led gang of crooks holes up in the house of an apparently harmless old lady. Big mistake, Hanks-led gang of crooks!

THE VERDICT If you wanted to bet on who could match the utter comic genius of the Alec Guinness–starring 1955 British original, the Coen Brothers would be your men. But we're still keeping our money in our pockets.

THE ALAMO

DIRECTED BY John Lee Hancock

STARRING Dennis Quaid, Billy Bob Thornton, Jason Patric

THE PITCH It's . . . the Alamo. Remember?

THE VERDICT Disney slashed the film's budget from $100 million–plus to $70 million, so don't expect an *epic* epic. But with a great-but-cheap cast, that still leaves a decent chunk of change for horses, explosions and, of course, dead Mexicans.

ENVY

DIRECTED BY Barry Levinson

STARRING Jack Black, Ben Stiller

THE PITCH Stiller is filled with — yes! — envy when pal Black becomes immensely wealthy thanks to his invention of a spray that makes dog shit disappear. No, we're not joking.

THE VERDICT There's no doubting the talent on display, but the film's repeatedly delayed release possibly indicates a level of shittiness no spray could eliminate.

WALKING TALL

DIRECTED BY Kevin Bray

STARRING The Rock, Johnny Knoxville

THE PITCH Anarchy and corruption reign in a small Northwest town — until former Special Forces muscleman The Rock becomes sheriff and starts beating the crap out of everyone with a big stick.

THE VERDICT Rock fans should enjoy a film that plays to his strengths — i.e., beating the crap out of everyone with a big stick.

"I asked for a clove hitch — this is a granny knot, you idiots!"

SHIPSHAPE

Russell Crowe is the ultimate alpha male in Peter Weir's rollicking historical epic. By Clark Collis

MASTER AND COMMANDER: THE FAR SIDE OF THE WORLD

DIRECTED BY Peter Weir

STARRING Russell Crowe, Paul Bettany, James D'Arcy, Edward Woodall, David Threlfall

20TH CENTURY FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT

✪✪✪✪

WHAT SHALL WE do with a drunken sailor? Make a movie about him! That, at least, has been Hollywood's recent successful policy. First was Johnny Depp's rum-quaffing Cap'n Jack Sparrow in *Pirates of the Caribbean.* Now comes *Master and Commander's* Jack Aubrey (Russell Crowe), who spends almost as much time boozing it up with his officers as he does chasing enemy warships around the Atlantic Ocean.

There, however, the similarities end. Where *Pirates* was a theme ride–based romp, *Master* is a much more serious project inspired by a series of historical novels by Patrick O'Brian. Actually, for what is (at least on paper) a big-budget action movie, this film is a very odd fish indeed — short on plot, deficient of a love interest and not set in space.

So why is *MAC: TFSOTW* (hey, pithy!) one of the most satisfying recent action flicks? Much of the credit must go to director Peter Weir, whose attention to the details of naval life invests the project with a reassuring weightiness while leaving no doubt that spending time aboard an English ship in the early nineteenth century was a nasty, brutish and often fatally short experience.

In fact, the crew of Aubrey's *HMS Surprise* endure so many difficulties while hunting down a seemingly indestructible French vessel, they make blowing up asteroids or fending off aliens seem like child's play. All are depicted in an authentic and, at times, extremely gruesome manner — for example, when the ship's doctor is forced to operate on himself (a scene that, for sheer squeamishness, tops anything in the past year's lineup of horror releases).

> **The crew's difficulties make fending off aliens seem like child's play.** ★

Master's real ace in the hole is Crowe, who oozes alpha-male leadership in a movie that often seems like an extended rumination on the subject. He may be a fist-happy boor in real life, but as Aubrey, he's utterly convincing as a man whose crew would willingly follow him into hell — or at least into *Master and Commander II.*

COLD CREEK MANOR

TOUCHSTONE HOME ENTERTAINMENT

✪✪

Cold Creek Manor's trailer made *Blender* assume that it was 1) a supernatural thriller and 2) quite good. Sadly, both assumptions were smashed on the cold, unyielding rocks of reality in the course of this crappy, made-for-TV-ish farrago, which finds Sharon Stone and Dennis Quaid's fresh start in the country being threatened by jaw-droppingly un-mysterious Stephen Dorff–related forces.

DICKIE ROBERTS: FORMER CHILD STAR

PARAMOUNT HOME VIDEO

✪

At last, a film that clears up once and for all how bad something has to be before it can be considered a waste of David Spade's talents. The ex-*SNL*'er stars as a onetime prepubescent TV icon who rents a family to live with so he can experience the childhood he missed out on and bag a role in the next Rob Reiner movie. What's that, you say? Nothing about the setup makes sense? *Exactimento!* Equally puzzling: the absence of anything that looks, sounds, feels or smells like a joke.

GOTHIKA

WARNER HOME VIDEO

✪✪✪

It speaks volumes about the paucity of parts for actresses that Halle Berry's first post-Oscar, post-*X-Men* role finds her playing a psychiatrist-turned-nuthatch inmate in this jumped-up horror B-movie. But Mathieu Kassovitz's creepy direction delivers just enough scares to make you forget the numerous canyon-size plot holes — and the absurd casting of Robert Downey Jr. as one of the few people in the film not wearing a straitjacket.

Gothika: Halle Berry *hates* wet T-shirt contests.

LOST IN TRANSLATION

UNIVERSAL STUDIOS HOME VIDEO

✪✪✪✪

The universal hailing of Bill Murray's performance as a dramatic breakthrough is somewhat ironic, given that he's actually funnier here than in some of his recent comedies (yes, that's you we're talking about, *Osmosis Jones*). But there's no doubting his godlike genius as a melancholic movie star who (sort of) romances Scarlett Johansson while filming a booze commercial in Japan.

MATCHSTICK MEN

WARNER HOME VIDEO

✪✪✪

Warning: If you are one of the many who find Nicolas Cage's thespian antics irritating, stay the hell away from *Matchstick Men,* whose central conceit — Cage plays an obsessive-compulsive grifter — allows the actor to unleash a

The Writing Process

School of Rock: Tenacious D's makeover proved disastrous.

Stephen Vaughan/SMPSP (Master and Commander); The Everett Collection (Gothika); Andrew Schwartz (School of Rock)

tsunami of berserk physical tics. But the result, if only two-thirds as clever as it thinks it is, stands as an honorable addition to the con-man genre, with a standout performance from Alison Lohman as the daughter Cage didn't know he had — and isn't sure he wants.

SCHOOL OF ROCK

PARAMOUNT HOME ENTERTAINMENT

✪✪✪✪

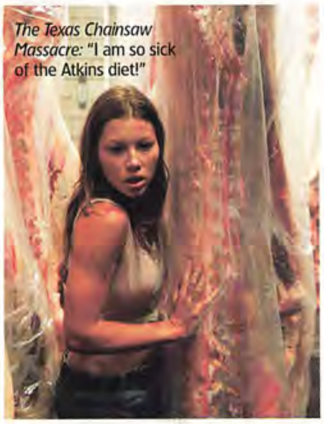
"God of Rock, thank you for this chance to kick ass. . . ." Who wants to see Jack Black play a drunken, classic rock–obsessed guitarist–turned–substitute teacher who whips his class of ankle-biters into the ultimate metal act? Pretty much everyone, it seems, given the unexpected but deserved success of Richard Linklater's extraordinarily good-hearted movie. And if all the kids who see it go off and form bands that sound just like AC/DC, then *all riiiiiight!*

SHOTGUN FREEWAY: DRIVES THROUGH LOST L.A.

TREMOLO PRODUCTIONS

✪✪✪

An offbeat, rambling but hugely watchable documentary about the City of Angels, *Shotgun Freeway* combines vintage metropolis-extolling promotional footage with celebrity interviews. Filmmaker John Milius recalls Hell's Angels trying to sell him heroin on the beach during his spell as a surf kid, while novelist James Ellroy gamely relives his youthful panty-sniffing for the camera. Ah, happy days. The DVD includes commentary from director Morgan Neville and a "lost" interview with LSD guru Timothy Leary.



The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: "I am so sick of the Atkins diet!"

STOKED

TRIMARK HOME VIDEO

✪✪✪✪

Six years in the making, this excellent documentary charts the rapid rise and homicidal fall of skater Mark "Gator" Rogowski. An infamously hard-partying prodigy (pro at 14, making $100,000 at 17), Rogowski then discovered God before raping and murdering a young woman when he found himself washed up at 24. Director Helen Stickler uses audio recordings from prison, old competition footage and interviews for an engrossing depiction of SoCal skate culture and its psychotic antihero. *LAUREN HARRIS*

THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE

NEW LINE HOME VIDEO

✪✪✪✪

A surprisingly satisfying, and often simply surprising, remake of the still-great horror classic. Debut director Marcus Nispel goes heavy on the artsy cinematography for the film's first two-thirds, and then even heavier on the large-breasted-girl-running-away-quickly-from-the-chainsaw-wielding-maniac. The first 10 ultra-shocking minutes are pretty much worth the price of admission alone — as are the last 10 — while R. Lee Ermey excels as probably the maddest movie cop ever.

BLENDER APPROVED

The best DVDs of the last three months

CURB YOUR ENTHUSIASM

HBO HOME VIDEO

Seinfeld co-creator Larry David hilariously portrays an irritable, self-obsessed, rude sitcom creator named, um, Larry David.

PUNK'D THE COMPLETE FIRST SEASON

PARAMOUNT HOME ENTERTAINMENT

Ashton Kutcher torments Justin Timberlake and others (although the others don't act like such big babies).

MUSIC DVDs

MAYOR OF THE SUNSET STRIP

FIRST LOOK MEDIA

✪✪✪✪

The (unofficial) mayor of the title is Rodney Bingenheimer, the KROQ DJ whose club, the English Disco, was *the* West Coast meeting place for rock dignitaries in the '70s. Replete with interview material from friends (Cher, Bowie) and clips of the acts Bingenheimer championed (Blondie, Oasis), this doc seems almost too well-upholstered for such a peripheral and frankly hobbit-ish figure (albeit one who apparently got more action than Robert Plant). *CLARK COLLIS*

VARIOUS ARTISTS

CONCERT FOR GEORGE

WSM

✪✪✪✪

"It wasn't about saying, 'Oh, this wonderful person! This saint!' That, George would've hated." Monty Python's Michael Palin sums up this restrained and star-studded concert, held at London's Royal Albert Hall in November 2002 in honor of the late Beatle. *ANDY PEMBERTON*

BELLE & SEBASTIAN

FANS ONLY

MATADOR

✪✪✪

This 136-minute batch of live shows, videos and documentary footage of the twee Glaswegians offers many moments of understated pleasure. Unfortunately, the disc's disorganized structure and the band's self-effacing nature make such moments feel too few and far between. *ANA LANE*

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE

LIVE IN LONDON

JIVE

✪✪✪

Timberlake's first solo tour was the U.K.'s fastest-selling concert of 2003. With dozens of backup dancers, multiple costume changes, even a simulated thunderstorm during "Cry Me a River," it's an impressive spectacle — but the lack of spontaneity saps some of the fun. *ANA LANE*

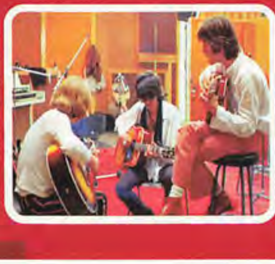
NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL MUSIC!

THE BEST VIDEOS OF 2003

COLUMBIA MUSIC VIDEO

✪✪

The mood on this no-frills set of 15 mostly artless clips ranges from dull and earnest (Train) to dull, angry and earnest (Godsmack), though Snoop Dogg's "Beautiful" and Jane's Addiction's "Just Because" relieve the tedium. *BRIAN DAWSON*



THE ROLLING STONES

SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL

ABKCO

✪✪

The half of Jean-Luc Godard's 1968 semi-documentary of the Stones recording their paean to devilry is quite beautiful and very good. But the half in which the nutjob auteur films people graffiti-tagging parts of London or reading books aloud while sitting in a wheelbarrow is quite French and very awful. *CLARK COLLIS*

The Everett Collection (The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, Curb Your Enthusiasm); courtesy of Paramount Home Entertainment (Punk'd)

"How's my driving? Call 800-EAT-SHIT."

WILD RIDE

Steal cars! Shoot people! Edit and direct chase scenes! It's Vice City for film geeks. By Jonah Weiner and Gabe Soria

DRIVER 3

ATARI — PS2, XBOX

✪✪✪

FROM *BULLITT* TO *The French Connection* to O.J. Simpson, the Hollywood car chase has become a classic American fantasy. The third installment of the 12 million–selling Driver series taps the thrills of that venerable tradition, with the added bonus of letting you smash into unwitting pedestrians and fire semiautomatic weapons into others' gas tanks.

You play as Tanner, an unshaven undercover cop (voiced by *Kill Bill*'s Michael Madsen) sent to infiltrate a global ring of car thieves. If you grow weary of either the plot or the sight of old ladies bouncing off your windshield, you can switch to "Film Director" mode, which lets you position cameras next to your tires, on cranes and under ramps to record your own sequences — the camera controls take a while to get the hang of, though, and the finished product is rarely worth the effort.

In "Story" mode, you're able to wrap your fender around fire hydrants while driving as many as 50 different vehicles — from a motorbike to an 18-wheeler — through the fabulously rendered streets of Miami, Istanbul and Nice, France. Along the way, you bump heads with Carlita, a curvaceous gang leader whose pants ride lower than a '79 Cadillac Braugham. If only you could direct a scene with *her*. . . .

James Brown and his imaginary car

JOYRIDE!

Pop stars like to drive. Really fast. Away from police

JAMES BROWN
In 1988, police were anxious to talk to Brown about how he allegedly brandished a shotgun in public. But the Godfather of Soul led the cops on a car chase that ended only when they shot out his tires.

DAVE GAHAN
Depeche Mode's singer prepared for his later career as a dissolute, heroin-shooting, washed-up rock star with a teenage career of vandalism and car theft. Summing up his youthful indiscretions, Gahan noted, "I was a real yob."

GEORGE JONES
During his marriage to fellow country star Tammy Wynette, crafty boozehound Jones once drove a 10-horsepower lawnmower more than 10 miles for a drink after wifey hid his car keys. Now *that's* determination!

FINAL FANTASY XI ONLINE

SONY — PS2

Yes, you read that Roman numeral right: this one goes to 11. (Take your lousy trilogy and stuff it, Tolkien!) The endless Japanese fantasy saga moves exclusively to the Internet in its latest installment. The graphics are astounding, the worlds to explore huge, but non–Final Fantasy acolytes might be lost when confronted with the game's almost impenetrable mythology and occasional dips into hack-and-slash monotony. ✪✪✪

NFL STREET

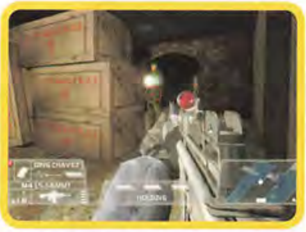
EA — PS2, GAMECUBE, XBOX

The NBA Street series revolutionized basketball video games, and that formula — action emphasized over subtlety — is applied to the gridiron with equally bangin' results. Matches occur in parks and street-corner lots, among other locations, and play is penalty-free, so if you feel like roughing the passer, then by all means make that punk hurt. Featuring a hip-hop soundtrack worthy of being a bootleg mix, this is *the* football game to beat in 2004. ✪✪✪✪

MANHUNT

ROCKSTAR — PS2, XBOX

Ever wondered what it feels like to stab someone's eyeballs with a dirty glass shard and mangle his groin with a rusty sickle? Well, wonder no more! In this thriller, which rewards suspenseful stealth attacks with ridiculous gore, you play a Vin Diesel–esque death-row escapee at the whim of a video camera–wielding sadist who directs your murderous missions. Villainy, videotape — it's like a night at R. Kelly's, only without the pee-pee. ✪✪✪✪



TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX 3

UBISOFT — PS2

In the latest installment of the first-person strategy/action game, players guide a four-person counterterrorism squad through missions requiring stealth and out-and-out firepower. The game's semi-jingoistic tone might put off left-wing gamers, but the addition of a cooperative two-player mode will make wannabe covert operatives happier than a spook with his first pair of night-vision goggles. ✪✪✪

BLENDER APPROVED

The best GAMES of the last three months

RISE TO HONOR

SONY — PS2

Martial-arts film star Jet Li headlines this fisticuffs fiesta, which blends Hong Kong verisimilitude with an inscrutable storyline and arcade-style action.

GRABBED BY THE GHOULIES

RARE — XBOX

This whimsical haunted-house adventure plays like a cross between *Ghostbusters* and *Resident Evil*, but its tone is more goofy than gory.

Neal Preston/Corbis (Brown)

WIN THIS REPLAY TV!

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SWEEEEET! The ReplayTV 5504 offers easy, tape-free recording and the ability to pause and rewind live TV. And because we love you so much, we'll throw in a free lifetime subscription! Solve the puzzle, cut out your completed version and send it to the address at the left. (Read official rules at blender.com.) Send us your answer and contact info by April 13, 2004. We'll pick a winner at random and post the winner's name at blender.com/crossword. *Whoo-ha!*

PENCIL ME IN!

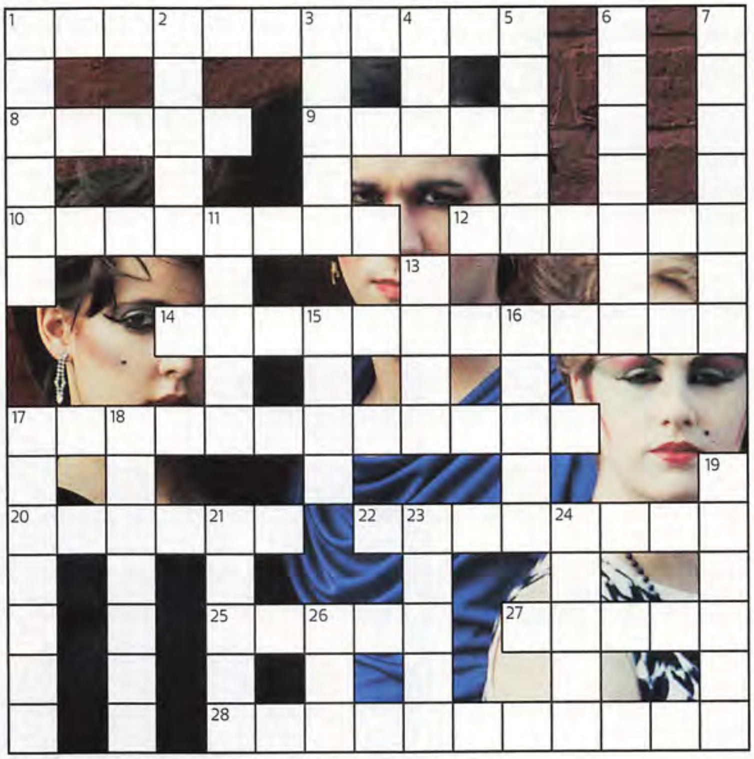
Hey, it's *Blender's* crossword! Starring 24 Down! BY BRENDAN QUIGLEY

ACROSS

- **1** Blink-182's sensual 2004 hit (two words)
- **8** Pearl Jam's 1991 breakthrough song
- **9** New Waver Gary, who hung out in cars
- **10** Gwyneth's favorite band
- **12** *Really* heavy metal genre
- **14** Pass the dutch to this rapper (two words)
- **17** 2003 Beatles record, stripped down? (four words)
- **20** He checked into a "Holidae In"
- **22** Indie band from Albuquerque named after a body part (two words)
- **25** He's going down, down, baby, your street in a Range Rover
- **27** 1988 Michael Jackson boast (two words)
- **28** They believe in a thing called love (two words)

DOWN

- **1** Country where Jim Morrison is buried
- **2** "Have You Ever Really ___ a Woman" (Bryan Adams ballad)
- **3** "Brothers ___ Work It Out" (Public Enemy)
- **4** U2 album *Rattle and ___*
- **5** Cornershop proprietor Tjinder ___
- **6** She was once like a bird; now she's powerless
- **7** The Offspring's "smash" of early 2004 (two words)
- **11** "___ It Black" (The Rolling Stones)
- **13** Folksy Suzanne
- **15** "___ Gone" (Hall & Oates)
- **16** Site of an annual summer festival in northern England
- **17** Rapper who starred in *S.W.A.T.* (four words)
- **18** Canine puppet who likes to poop on things
- **19** Songs on singles that rarely get airplay (two words)
- **21** 50's posse (two words)
- **23** Outkast's number 1 of 2003 and 2004 (two words)
- **24** "Don't You Want Me?" New Wavers the ___ League
- **26** Tommy, known for drum solos and home porn movies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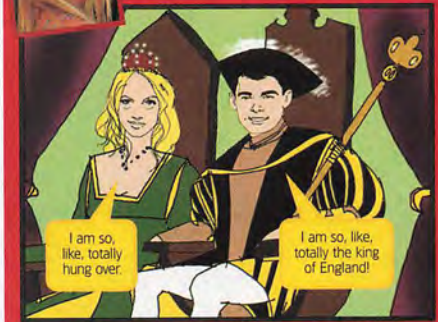
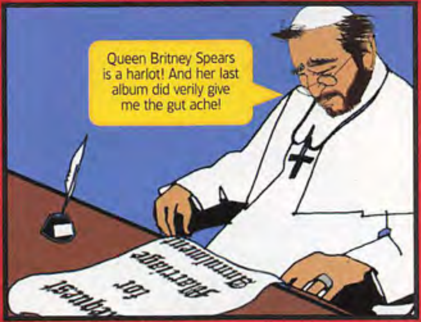
POP HISTORY! 1527: QUEEN BRITNEY SPEARS OF ENGLAND GETS HER MARRIAGE ANNULLED

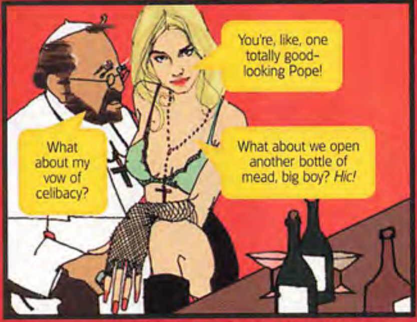
WRITTEN BY CLARK COLLIS. ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN JAY


I am so, like, totally hung over.
I am so, like, totally the king of England!

↑ After ascending to the throne of England, Britney Spears enters an ill-advised union with one of her subjects.


Queen Britney Spears is a harlot! And her last album did verily give me the gut ache!

↑ Sadly, her attempt to get the marriage annulled by Pope Augustine the Unwise IV proves fruitless. . . .


You're, like, one totally good-looking Pope!
What about my vow of celibacy?
What about we open another bottle of mead, big boy? Hic!

↑ . . . Until, that is, Queen Britney decided to ask him for the annulment in person.

Steve Grantz/WireImage.com (Spears); Simon Fowler/LFI (The Human League)

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He's the 27-year-old ex-member of 'N Sync who enjoys shaving one leg, dropping "the *f* bomb" and the occasional 'shroom. Hey . . .

BY ROB TANNENBAUM
PHOTOGRAPHY BY KENNETH CAPPELLO

WHO DOES JC CHASEZ THINK HE IS?

That's an interesting self-portrait you drew. But there's something missing.
What's that?

Where are your eyes, JC?
Those *are* my eyes! I guess that's just how I see myself. I have small eyes, and I'm usually laughing or smiling anyway, so my eyes get really small.

What was the most memorable phone call of your life?
Probably when I was 5, and I was told that I was going to be adopted. I wasn't in a home or anything; I was living with my mother. And then she was like, "Hey, how would you feel about moving in with these people?" And I was like — [*shrugs*]. My folks are dope. They're killer. I've been happy ever since.

What drug will you never take again?
Anything with chemicals scares the shit out of me. I've seen people fall apart, and I won't have any part of that. I've only done mushrooms and smoked pot. And I won't say that I'll never do those again, because I have a long life in front of me.

What's your favorite curse word?
I like to use them all! I probably drop the *f* bomb more than any other. And one of my favorite things to say is "What's up, fucker?" It's a term of endearment, in every way. It's the same thing with *shitty* — it's my nickname for everybody. "How you doin,' Shitty?" It's a nice thing to say, believe it or not. I even have a stuffed animal named Shitty.

Tell us about the first time you ever got drunk.
It was fun. I was 13 or so, at a pool hall in my hometown, Bowie, Maryland. We'd make somebody buy us beer, then we'd put it in a Dixie Cup. I like to have fun when I drink, let my inhibitions fall a bit, but I've probably been really out of my mind only twice.

Have you ever shaved any part of your body other than your face?
Yes, my leg. I was a foot model when I was 13. This guy saw me on the beach one day, and he asked to take a picture of my foot. I was like, "You're weird, man." He was like, "Dude, you have a clean-looking, cool foot." So he took a Polaroid, called me the next day and said, "My clients want to use your foot for these posters." I shaved my leg, they painted it to look like stone and I got paid two grand. It was like the lottery.

Is it good to be you?
It doesn't suck! Even on a bad day.

What do people who don't like you say about you?
They just don't know me. It's hard not to like me.

How would you characterize your taste in sex?
Uh, I like girls [*laughs*]. As long as they're female, they're of-age and we get along, I can make things work.

Why is the of-age part important?
'Cause I don't want to go to jail. And 'cause it's gross.

Should people take you seriously?
Yes and no. I work hard, but it's just entertainment. I don't have the cure for cancer. Certain songs I worked on are just jokes, and they're meant to be taken lightly.

Maybe you're thinking about your lyric " 'Cause when I'm all alone/ I lie awake and masturbate"?
But that's not a joke! That's part of being lonely and wanting to be with someone. When you've been separated for a long time, that's part of what keeps you going.

I think we're done, Shitty.
Cool, man! You get it! [BLENDER]

["It's hard not to like me."]

T-SHIRT AND JEANS BY **J. LINDEBERG**, SNEAKERS BY **CONVERSE**

Grooming: Andie Markee-Byrne; styling: Cannon for Oliver Piro. Shot on location at Max Fish, New York

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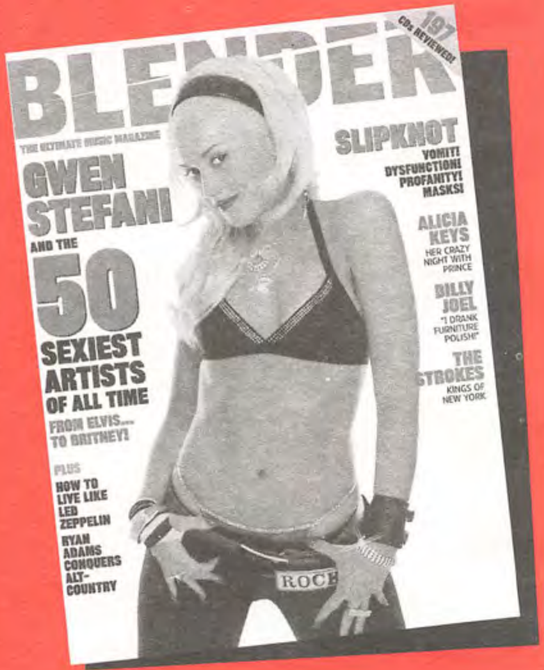
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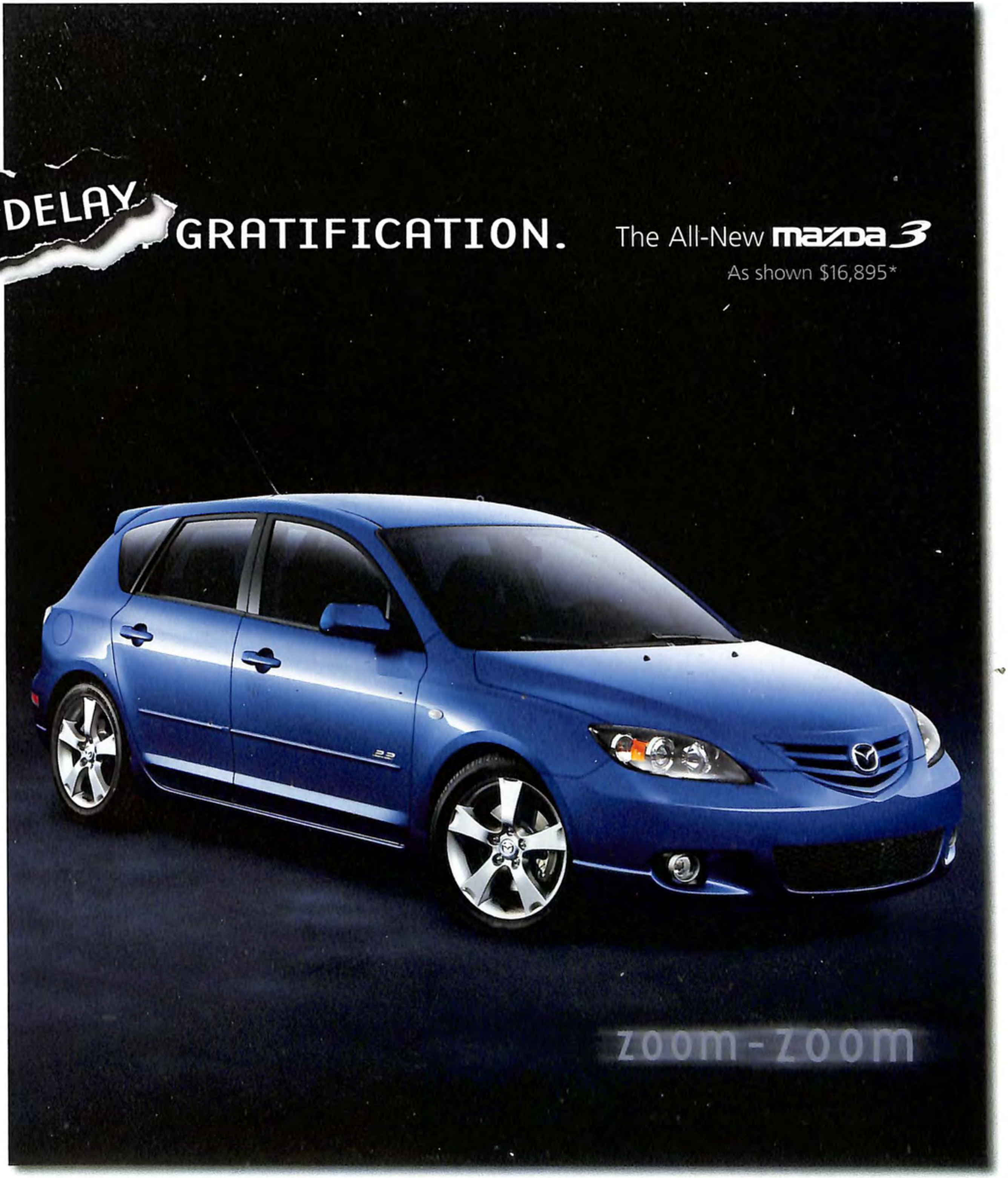

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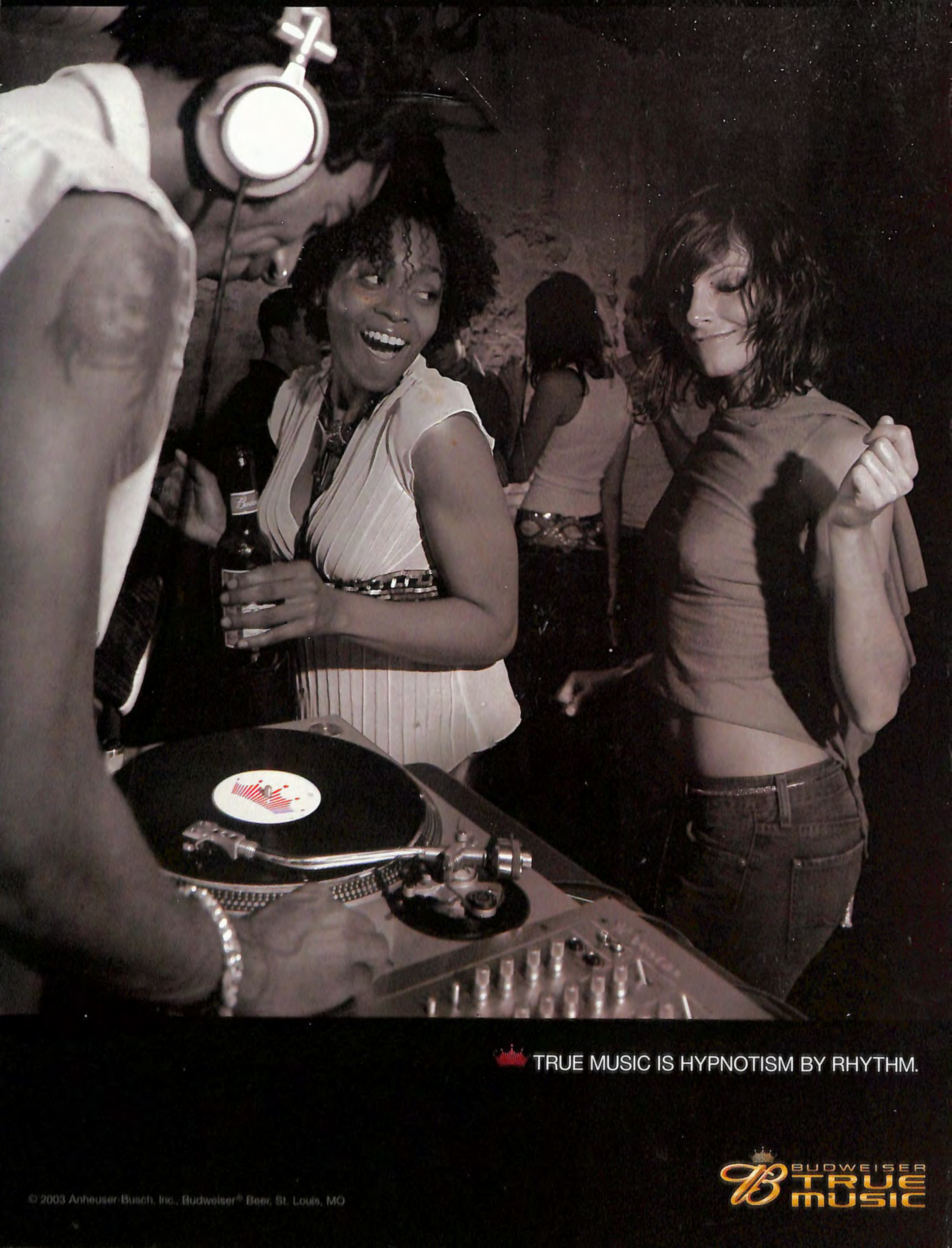

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